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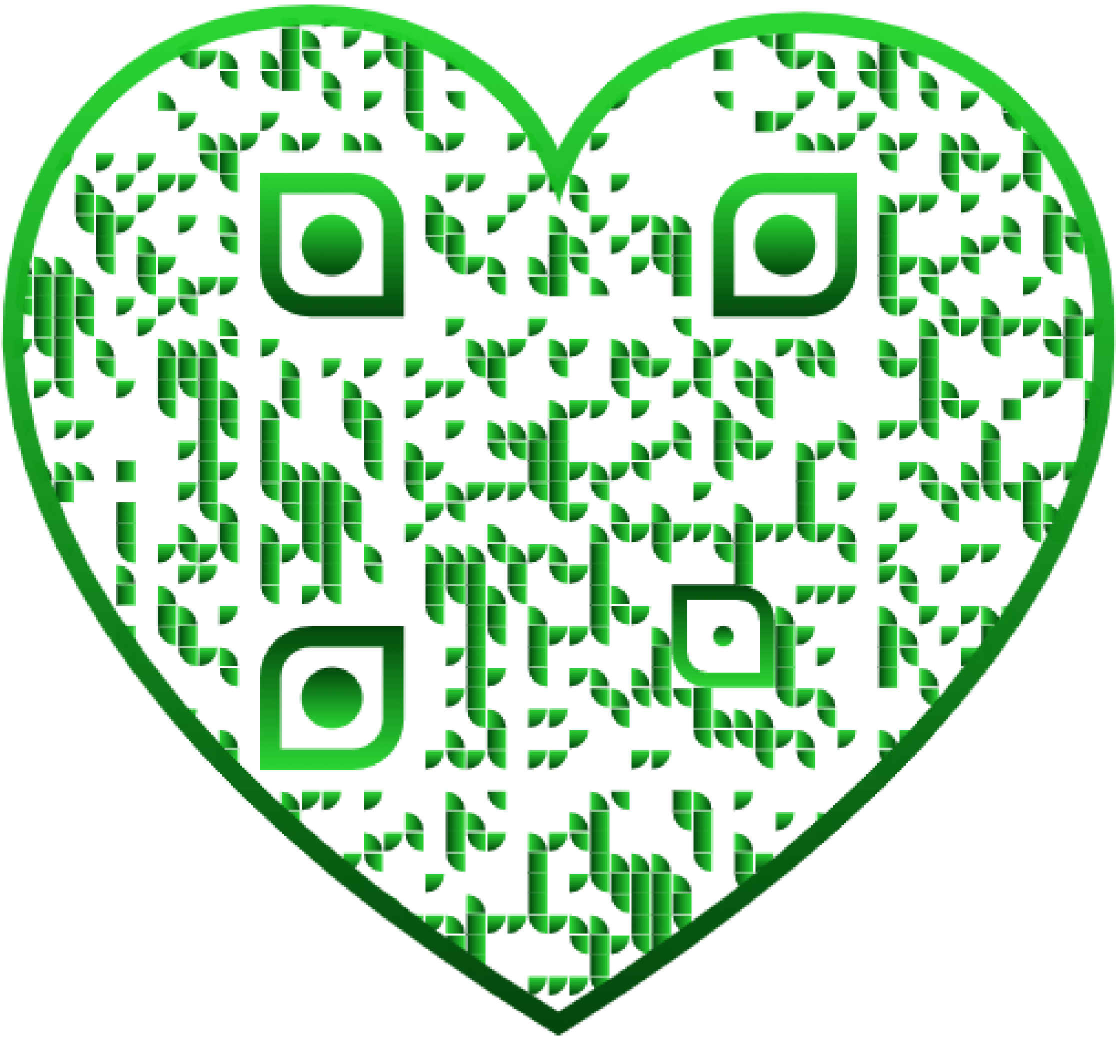

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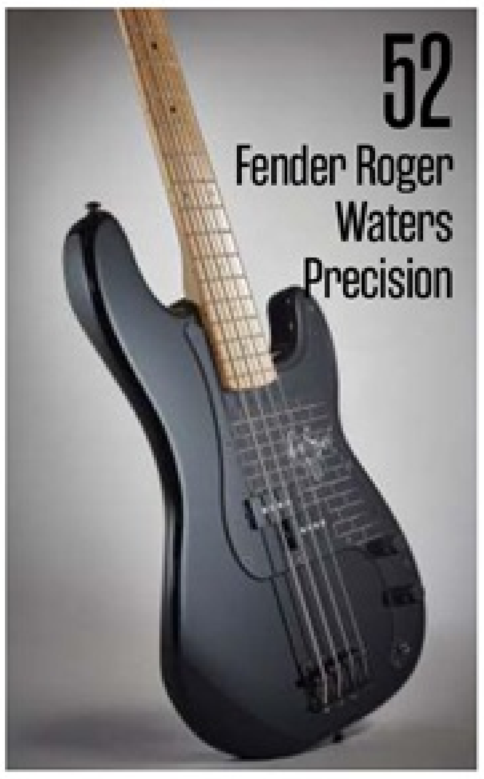
And so this is Christmas... and what have we done? Well, in answer to the late John Lennon's musings, we've recently completed two highly relevant tasks related to the bass community. First up, welcome to our Gear Of The Year issue, where we collate the most essential products released in bass world in 2017. For maximum user-friendliness we've divided the fretted bass guitar category into four price bands – from under £500, to £2500 and above – while fretless and acoustic instruments also appear, alongside heads, cabs, combos and effects. If your favourite gear of '17 isn't there, let us know!

We've also been busy behind the scenes of the London Bass Guitar Show, set for 3 and 4 March. As always it's going to be the bass event of the year, so book your tickets now... and let me be the first to announce that none other than Guy Pratt will be appearing at the LBGS. Make a note of those Pink Floyd and Madonna questions (not to mention the great man's long-running standup comedy act) and we'll see you there. More artist announcements to follow!

Alongside our ace cover feature chat with Rick Savage of Def Leppard – 100 million album sales and counting – and a host of stellar bassists from the rock and indie worlds, we've pulled off a major coup with a five-page guest feature from none other than Victor Wooten, perhaps the world's most gifted bass player, courtesy of the Players School in Florida. We road-test a range of killer bass gear from a £315 Ibanez to a £2450 Spector, and our elite tutors will finish off the year as they started it – with the sole objective of making you the best bassist you can be.

Thanks from the bottom of our low-frequency hearts for your support over the 13 issues we've published on this last trip around the sun. Stick with us, and we promise you another bass-packed year!

Joel McIver, editor



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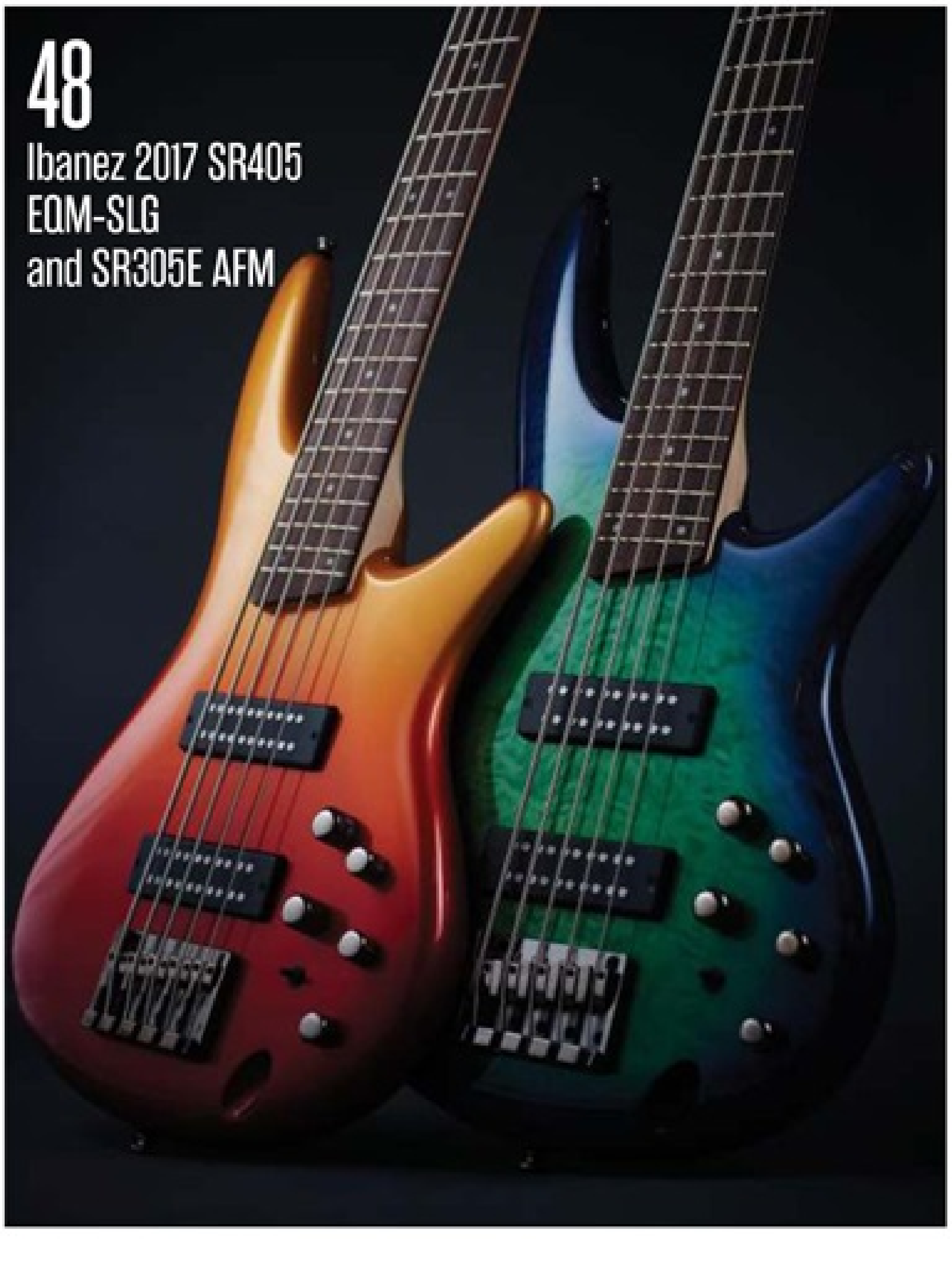

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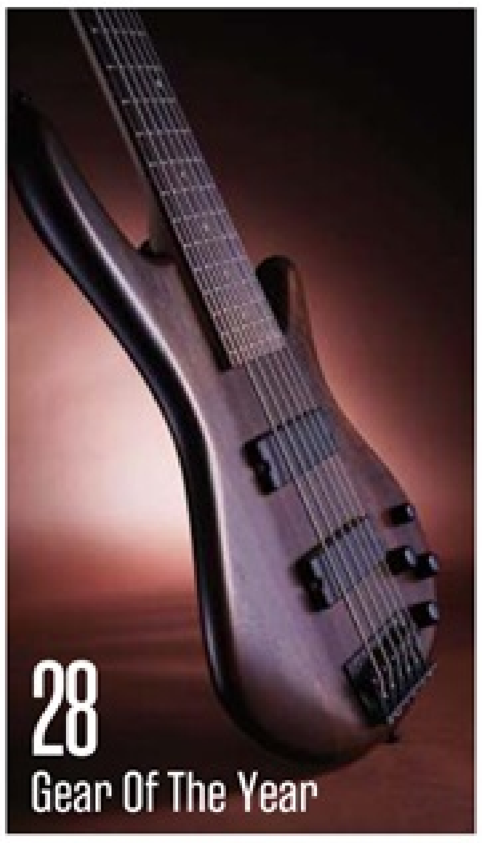
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THE LOW DOWN

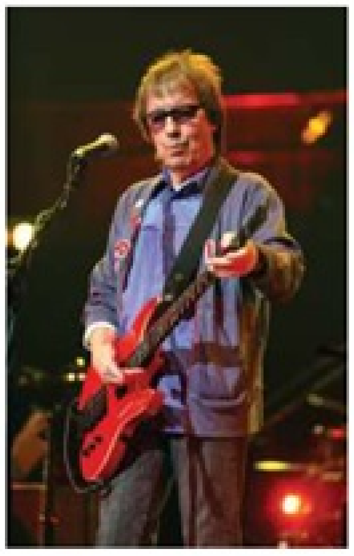
News and views from the bass world, collated by *BGM*'s team of intrepid newshounds

DIAMOND GEEZER

Veteran Brit amp-makers Ashdown have announced the 'Head Of Doom' Geezer Butler Signature Head, a top with some Geezer-specific spec that will have metal bassists lining up in anticipation. The unit is hand-built in the UK, based on Ashdown's established ABM range, and is rated at a highly appropriate 666 watts RMS. It offers a ton of features, from the passive/active selector switch down to the pair of Speakon outputs. The Head Of Doom is the first Ashdown amp to feature not one but two VU meters, the second VU meter monitoring output level. A nine-band EQ shapes the tone and a dedicated 'Doom' control increases the current to the pre-amp valve stage, adding distortion to the sound. A sub-harmonic generator adds an octave below the notes being played, just for added heaviness. This monster is available now for £1099.

www.ashdownmusic.com

KINGS OF R&B



Sometime Rolling Stones bassist Bill Wyman and his Rhythm Kings band have announced the release of a 4-LP box set titled *My King And Queen: Georgie Fame And Beverley Skeete* through the Demon Music Group. The box set features 43 recordings by Wyman and the Rhythm Kings, the 10-piece band that he put together after leaving the Stones in 1993. Guest appearances come from Mick Taylor, Eric Clapton, Chris Rea, George Harrison, Gary Brooker and Peter Frampton as well as Georgie Fame, Beverley Skeete and Albert Lee. Fame and Skeete have two LPs each, featuring their respective talents.

www.billwyman.com

STING AND KING

Mark King of Level 42 was one of many famous entertainers who attended BBC Radio 2's Children In Need fundraising extravaganza on 5 November at London's Dorchester Hotel. While celebs on site included Ken Bruce, Sara Cox, Anneka Rice, Melanie C, Tony Blackburn, Zoe Ball, Johnny Walker, Jeremy Vine and other 'faces' of the BBC persuasion and otherwise, the only one playing bass was Mr King. Our man performed on a Sterling by Music Man SUB Ray 4, donated by Ernie Ball's UK distributors Strings & Things. The bass was later sold for a truly magnificent £10,000.

As Mark tells us, "I was blown away by the generosity of the bidding for the Sterling bass which I played at the recent Children In Need bash. It was a wonderful afternoon. Sincere thanks to Strings & Things for supplying the bass for me to auction. Nice one!"

Alex Byford of Strings & Things added: "When *BGM* and Mark approached us with a plan to supply a bass for Mark to play and then auction off for this wonderful cause, there was no hesitation. Excellent work, chaps!"

© Steve Coleman

www.bbcchildreninneed.co.uk

WOOTEN AT WORK

In 2012, luthiers Cort donated an Arona 5 bass to a survivor of the 7.0 Haitian earthquake in 2010; the natural catastophe had resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties and displaced millions of people. Victor Wooten and his team decided to document the story of this young bassist, leading to the release of a new film called *Haiti 10*, recently released to the public.

Watch it at http://bit.ly/2ic1Aie

SWEET SWEDE

Hagstrom's marvellous H8 eight-string blew our minds in ***BGM*** 150, so we're chuffed that UK distribs Rosetti have told us that two more mighty Hagstroms are on the way. Both retro, both harking back to the glory days of big old Euro-basses when cabs were massive and real men had perms, the instruments are the Super Swede and the H8-II.

The Super Swede, it says here, was one of Hagstrom's last projects before Swedish production stopped back in the 80s and was a collaboration between their chief designer Per-Åke Olsson and Rutger Gunnarsson, bassist for ABBA, as used by Rutger throughout ABBA's final North American tour in 1980. Only 364 of these basses were produced and they've become a sought-after collector's item. The new one has a Resinator fingerboard, a "single massive neck structure" and Hagstrom's own J-Quad quad-stacked humbuckers. Grab one for £1029.

The H8-II comes with a double cutaway mahogany body, bolted to a Canadian maple neck supported with Hagstrom's H-Expander truss-rod. The bass features a finger-friendly 30.75" scale length, a dot-inlaid Resinator fingerboard and Hagstrom's DynaRail humbuckers with an additional coil-split feature activated by a push/pull switch built into the volume control. The price? £859.

www.rosetti.co.uk

SHOP TALK

A new feature in which we meet a renowned bass-maker

The Marleaux stand at the London Bass Guitar Show last March was a thing of beauty. I asked luthier Gerald Marleaux about each of the models on display – especially the weird ones! – and was totally drawn by his infectious enthusiasm. He is a driving force. "I love this show," he says. "It's like a family, with mutual respect and no competition between luthiers, because our creations are all so different."

We start with the Consat, the first design Marleaux ever made. "We created it in 1990 and never changed it, and it's still the most common Marleaux shape," he explains. "This model has a neck-through construction with a bubinga top, ebony fingerboard and satin polyurethane lacquer. But that's only one option: we make every bass by order: the woods we use, as well as the spacing, scale, and any other spec, are entirely the customer's choice."

We then admire the purple five-string Diva Longhorn, which Marleaux describes as having a 'feminine' shape and being a hit with female visitors, bassists or not. It's very distinctive and at the same time elegant and tasteful. "We make it fretless only, as adding frets would kill the design. The pickup, bridge, knobs, everything is specially made for this bass."

The five-string Contra causes me to do a double take. "This is a hybrid construction," explains Marleaux, "a cross between an acoustic stringed instrument and an electric bass guitar. The left side is hollow like a violin, while the right side is a solid body like an electric bass guitar. We use maple for the neck and body, spruce for the top, and ebony for the fingerboard. The resulting shape is a singlecut that has no neck dive, a woody sound, fast attack, consistently low sustain on the whole fretboard, and crisp harmonics. We thought it was crazy: after we made the first bass of this kind I was so surprised at how good it was that I thought it might be a lucky accident. We made another one, but it was equally good! We decided to never change anything on that model, not even the woods we use."

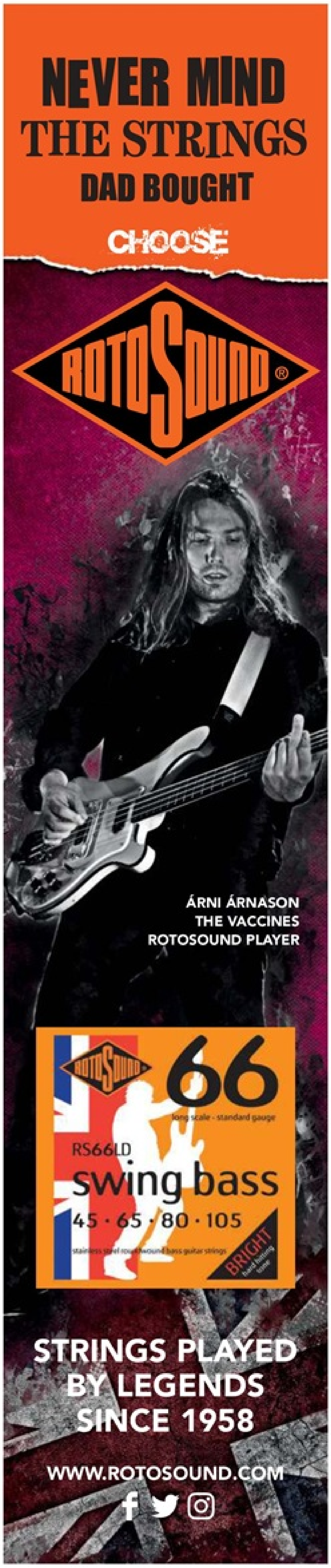
I notice that Marleaux seems to favour five-string basses. A luthier after my own heart! "Yes," he confirms, "we build mostly five-string basses because that's what our customers ask for." We turn our attention to the Votan. "This is the most traditional model we build, the closest to the traditional Precision shape. It has a more traditional sound too. Playability is also very similar to a P-Bass. The bridge and electronics are all our own brand, and our hardware is made to our specification by Schaller." A Marleaux bass for Fender aficionados, then.

Marleaux brought a new model to the show: the Tiuz, in four- and five-string versions. I immediately notice the complex electronics. "An active/passive four-band preamp with volume, pickup switch for single coil and humbucker, passive tone, active/passive switch, treble, high mid, low mid and bass; three different options for each band – treble, mid and bass," he explains. Aren't so many knobs a bit confusing? "Perhaps," replies Marleaux, "but you can store a preset sound, and then simply tweak it on the spot according to your needs. Some bassists may well find it too much to handle, but you can keep the bass in passive mode, with the traditional sound, and just use the active versatility where necessary."

When I see the pint-sized Sopran, I genuinely wonder if it's a ukulele. "No, it's a real bass!" exclaims Marleaux. "An entirely new kind of instrument. One of our retailers asked us for a bass-shaped clock for their shop, so we made one using a reduced-size Consat body. We then made a second body like that, and a suitable neck, just for fun. Then we completed it with strings, a bridge, hardware and so on and I couldn't believe how good it sounded. Great playability, tuned EADG but one octave higher than a normal bass, and you can make it sound closer to a guitar, or something between bass and guitar. Play it for five minutes, maybe some soloing with a looper, and you'll be trying new chords and styles, just because on that bass you can!" Indeed. And that bass, like all those others at the stand, had already sold.

Silvia Bluejay

www.marleaux-bass.de



BASSWATCH

Every month, keen bass-spotter Ray Walker brings us an online bargain.

Kinal MK-5B
£1495 https://tinyurl.com/ybhfebbo

This month's little eyecatcher is a hand-built Canadian number. Ladies and gents, behold the Kinal MK-5B. This five-string beauty is the product of luthier Mike Kinal and comes with some very nice features indeed. It boasts an alder body with a quilted maple top with matching ramp as well as a five-piece maple neck with a pau ferro fingerboard. The pickups are Bartolini soapbars with an 18-volt preamp. With the addition of adjustable string spacing, string-through-body option and Hipshot hardware, this bass is quite the conversation starter. The price is on the high side but you don't see many of these online – go on, Christmas is coming...

REVOLVER

Every month we tell you the bass-line we can't stop listening to

THIS MONTH: The Clash, 'Rock The Casbah', 1982

Bassist: Topper Headon
Yes, you read that right – the bassist on punk rockers the Clash's 1982 single 'Rock The Casbah' was not that band's sublimely talented bassman Paul Simonon but drummer Topper Headon. According to ancient lore, Headon composed and performed the song himself, playing piano, bass and drums, and the rest of the band liked it so much so that the song was released with nothing but a few minor overdubs. What do we learn from this? That life is but a hallucination, that the universe is not real and that a drummer can nick our job...

GIG READY

FOR £500

GET YOURSELF ON STAGE FOR HALF A GRAND!

BASS Ibanez GSR 200B-WNF, £195

AMP Peavey MAX110 MKII combo, £260

FX Mooer Audio Fog Bass Fuzz, £45

FOR £1000

READY TO ROLL FOR £1K!

BASS Sub By Sterling Ray4, £370

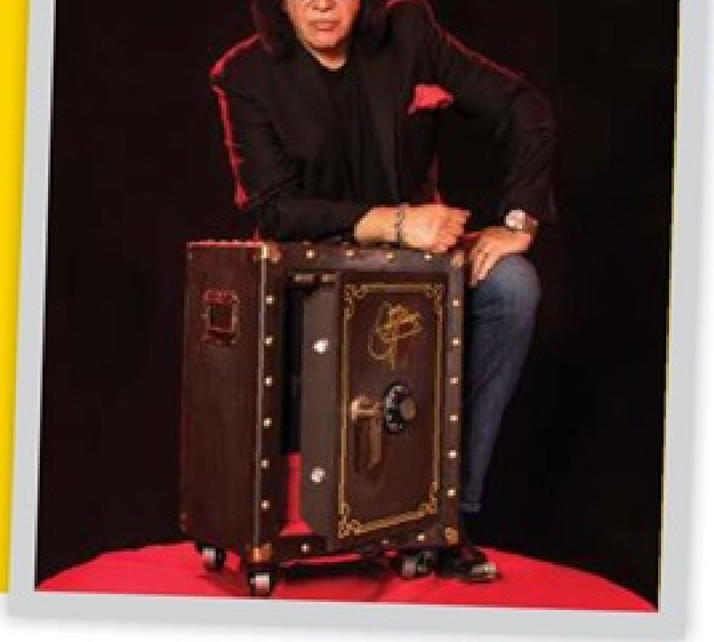
AMP GK MB115 combo, £450

FX BOSS ME-20 B Multi FX, £180

GENE GENIUS

Gene Simmons of Kiss, now 50 years into a career that has led to a fortune not unadjacent to $400 million, has gone one better than Kiss's usual OTT antics by releasing a massive 38lb steel box called the Vault. This $2000 item contains 150 unreleased tracks, a photo book, an action figure and other collectables and is delivered to the buyer by Simmons in person. It was also bundled with the now-lapsed Vault Experience, where fans paid $25,000 for a one-hour private studio preview with Simmons and an Executive Producer credit in the Vault itself, or £50,000 for Gene to come to the buyer's home for two hours and entertain up to 25 guests. You have to give the man credit for thinking big – all this is in a slightly different league from the usual British band's marketing strategy, where you get a pack of badges as a thank-you for buying a CD. Gene and his Vault will be on our cover in March, talking about the project as well as his Axe basses and other low-end revelations.

www.genesimmonsvault.com



THE MU

Build a career in music like this, say the MU

People often ask us if the Musicians' Union (MU) represents people starting out. The answer is simple – yes we do. So, here's our basic list of how to make sure your career is built on solid foundations, and if you've been working for a while, it's good to revisit this list.

1. Have a goal and make a plan to achieve it
This will put you in a great position. These days, most musicians need to promote themselves, and there is a lot you can do yourself. Create your identity, identify your target market, and work out how to connect with them. This research is relevant for all areas of music and can make a huge difference. Gather contacts as much as possible. Music is your career, so act professionally. If you need backing and don't have the money yourself, check out your funding options and get planning! The MU has plenty of advice on this, and the Help Musicians' UK's funding wizard is a good place to start your funding search.

2. Get It In Writing
Before engaging in any work as a musician, it is hugely important to get what you are agreeing in writing, be it a live booking, going in to record or co-writing. We have template contracts available online, covering various areas of work. It's impossible to overstress how important this is – if an unpaid fee, cancellation or other issue occurs, it is much easier to recover the fee. These issues do occur in music, so protect yourself with a clear agreement. Evidence is key, and will make your rights clearer. Proving a verbal agreement is of course extremely difficult, so follow it up in writing.

3. Register with PRS for Music and MCPS
Start to understand where the money comes from. If you're composing music, then look into joining PRS For Music (Performing Rights Society) and MCPS (Mechanical Copyright Protection Society), and registering your works with them. Both are collection societies, meaning they will collect royalties for uses of your songs on your behalf, and distribute them to you accordingly. PRS collect money for the broadcast (airplay) and public performance (in clubs, bars and so on) of works. MCPS collects the licence fees due from the record company whenever registered music is reproduced for products such as CDs and digital downloads. This additional source of royalty income is separate from the 'artist' royalty which the record company is required to pay directly to the artists featured on the record under their recording contract. If the songwriter and the artist are the same person, the record company will end up paying two different royalties to that particular member.

4. Join PPL
If you're a recording rights holder or performing on recordings you should join the collection society PPL (Phonographic Performance Limited). Regardless of whether you are a session musician or featured artist, joining PPL is something you should be doing. On behalf of its members, PPL collects royalties for a range of uses of recorded music – when it is played in public or broadcast on TV, radio and certain digital media services. Those that own their recordings must register them with PPL in order for the collection society to be able to collect on their behalf for the range of uses mentioned.

5. Know your rights – and protect them
That's where we come in, as the only trade union for musicians in the UK. The Musicians' Union provides benefits to members at all levels – career advice, training, free instrument and public liability insurance and legal assistance – all so you can focus on being a musician.

Info: www.theMU.org, @WeAreTheMU

BASSICALLY SPEAKING

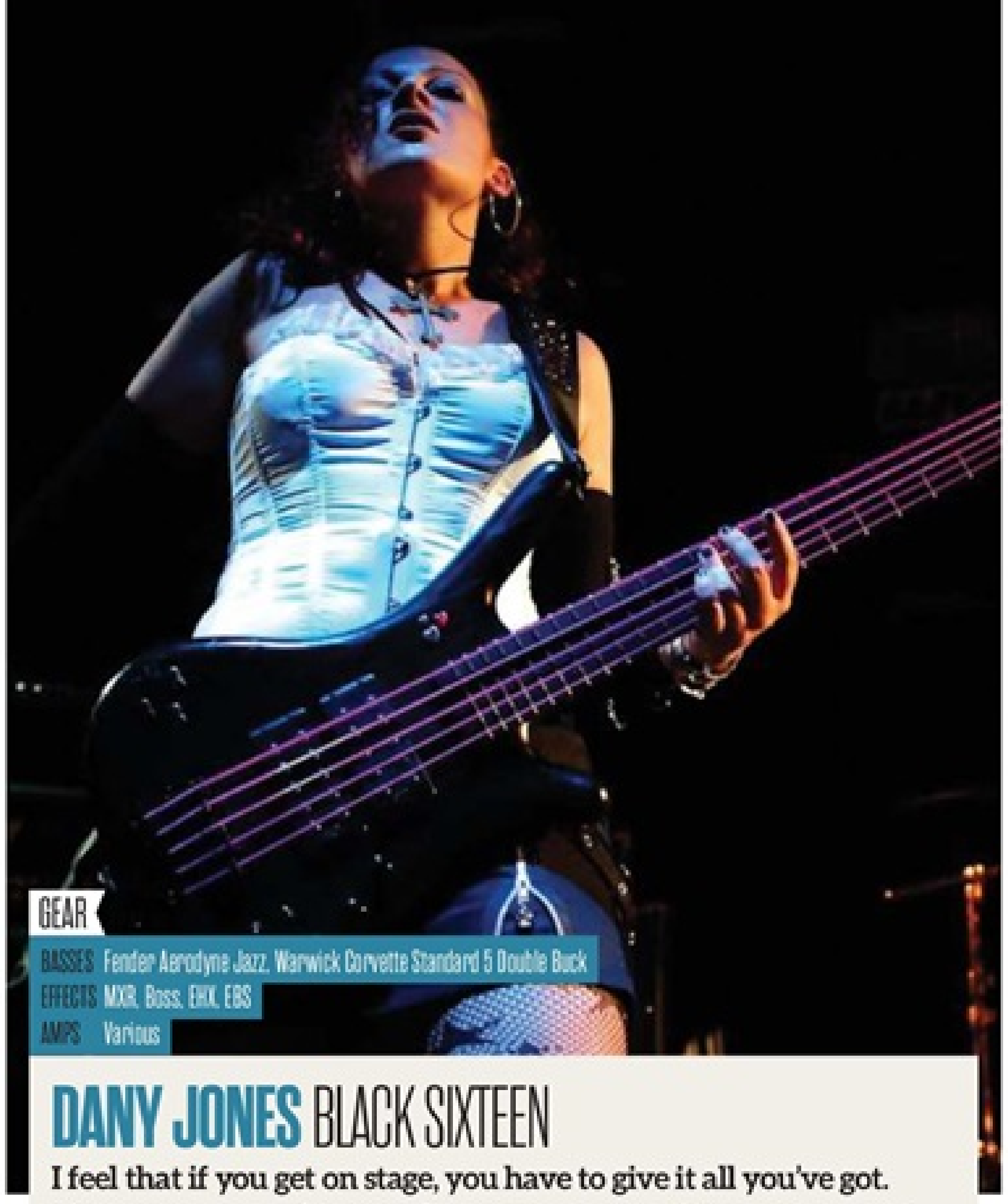
Bassists reveal the tricks of their trade faster than a snapping D string

GEAR
BASSES Music Man Bongo
EFFECTS Sansamp Bass Driver Deluxe, Dr Freakenstein Dwarf Bass, Electro-Harmonix Deluxe Bass Big Muff Pi, Line 6 Bass Floor POD, BOSS ODB-3 Bass Overdrive, Boss TU-3 Chromatic Tuner
AMPS Trace Elliot GP12 SMX

ADAM LIGHTSPEED DIAMOND BLACK

My bass style is loud, dirty and in your face. I use a very processed signal to get as full a sound as possible. As Diamond Black only have one guitarist I like to try and fill in as much of the space as I can by layering up different amp modellers, fuzzes and distortions. Diamond Black are endorsed by Gibson, Kemper, ENGL, Rotosound and InTune Guitar Picks, and most of our tracks are in drop D so all my basses are four-strings. My main bass is a Music Man Bongo, but there is a five-string version available so I think it will be next on my shopping list. I've recently switched to always playing with a pick instead of fingers, as I did for years, as it just gives a harder and more driving tone which suits the music better – and you can't really slap and use a pick at the same time! Melissa Auf Der Maur is my favourite bassist of all time. I wear a wristband with MadM written on it at every show I play. Matt Freeman from Rancid is just another level of amazing. The first time I heard the bass solo in 'Maxwell Murder' I was in love. I also really dig Hunter from AFI, Peter Hook and of course, the legend that is Flea. The greatest bass player that ever lived is the one, the only, the ultimate rock'n'roll legend Lemmy Kilmister. Talk about a unique style. He was amazing. RIP dude. We have just released our debut single and music video for 'Sorrow', which you can check out online. A full release and tour are coming later in the year and I also have my own design studio, so I'm a busy boy!

www.diamondblackofficial.com



GEAR
BASSES Fender Aerodyne Jazz, Warwick Corvette Standard 5 Double Buck
EFFECTS MXR, Boss, EHX, EBS
AMPS Various

DANY JONES BLACK SIXTEEN

I feel that if you get on stage, you have to give it all you've got. Playing from your heart and from your gut is what connects you to the audience; establishing that mutual unspoken dialogue with the listener. My motto is 'get loud or go home'. I guess you could say that I am a heavy-handed player; I'm a total metalhead and I have always been into heavy players, especially drummers. I play a five-string bass because it is brilliant for detuning and you'll find a lot of that in heavy metal. I love to have the option of that extra low B and I love downtunings. I also thought of getting a six-string bass at some point. When I'm in a guitar shop, I am like a kid in a candy store: you can never have too many basses! I have had an endorsement with Warwick bass and I am in talks with Ernie Ball since I love and mostly use their strings. I occasionally slap because it is great fun and because when it suits, it sounds great. It just gives that ultra-percussive effect that makes you wanna bob your head and jump around. I'm far from being a great slap bassist though, especially after watching some of the masters such as Flea, Mark King and Victor Wooten. I feel that one should never limit oneself by defining specific genres and techniques. Slapping is just one flavour and certainly predominant in a certain style, however I feel that the more weapons you add to your arsenal, the more inventive and versatile you will be as a player. I just want to be the best bassist I can ever be, and the first rule of success in my book is hard work, open-mindedness, tons of experimenting and getting out of your comfort zone. I recently did a session with Mark Tremonti, guitarist from Creed and Alter Bridge, and I found it fascinating how he would take the rules and completely dismantle them. The secret of playing bass well? Play to a metronome, click track or drum beat at all times. Play slow first, in fact, incredibly slow. I always find that a lot harder than playing fast. Be honest; know your strengths and use your weaknesses not to limit you, but to work harder focusing on those areas till you get over the hurdles. And you will get over them! Most of all, listening to tons of music, any music. There is some great music in every genre, even in manufactured pop, and inspiration is just around the corner. Finally, in a band situation, listen to the people you're playing with; really listen. Don't let 'realists' put you off or arrogant idiots put you down. It is pointless to compete with others; we are all unique in our very own individual way. Never give in and never think you are ever too old or not good enough. I actually started as a singer and had a brief stint on guitar, until, later in life, I picked up the bass and it suddenly felt like home. People would tell me that I was too old to start playing an instrument and that I would never get anywhere, so I might as well give up now. Sure, I am yet to play Wembley Stadium, but I can proudly say that I have bagged support slots to the Backyard Babies and Hatebreed, I have sung with Cherie Currie from the Runaways and bass legend Suzi Quatro, and I'm talking to you right now, aren't I?

www.blacksixteen.com

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GEAR
BASSES Fender Precision
EFFECTS Tech21 SansAmp Bass Driver DI V.2
AMPS Gallien-Krueger

JAMES LIGHTFOOT
THE UNCULTURED

My bass style is hard, fast and intricate. I like to live in the kick drum. I do not play five- or six-string bass, because I am not a jazz bastard. I slap behind closed doors because it's fun, but I don't in this band or in front of people because I'm not a funk bastard. The secret of playing bass well is listen to the kick, restrain when possible, less is more. My first bass was a handmade beat up light blue beast from my uncle. My favourite bass ever to date is my Fender Precision – gig worn and never lets me down. My bass heroes are Flea, Billy Gould, Mick Quinn, Paul McCartney, Bootsy Collins, and the greatest bass player that ever lived is Billy Gould. The importance of playing with a drummer over time, consistently and obsessively, will enable you to see the music before it arrives, and thus when you do a improvised fill, the drummer will have seen it coming too, and amazingly lock with your fill, and vice versa.

www.theyuncultured.com

GEAR
BASSES Fender Precision
EFFECTS None
AMPS Various

GREG MCDEVITT CAN'T SWIM

When I'm by myself I almost exclusively play 'Laid To Rest' by Lamb Of God, but with this band I've definitely adopted a much smoother style. We're very drum and bass centred, so I often forego flashiness for a more reserved style that complements the other instrumentation. I could honestly get away with playing a three-string bass for most of our set. I think there is a time and a place for popping another string on the bass, but our style of music does not really call for it. I grew up learning how to play punk and hardcore songs, but I was lucky enough to have an instructor who insisted that I learn multiple styles, including slap. I still practise slap bass all the time, but I have yet to find a way to incorporate it into our songs. Some of the most famous musicians in the world can hardly play their instruments, and some of the best players in the world have probably never even played a show. There are no secrets or rules. My first bass was a Playmate brand that I bought for $70 at my local music shop. It was a piece of trash but I loved it. Ain't nothin' wrong with a good, ol' fashioned Fender American P-Bass. Preferably with a maple neck. Tony Lombardo of the Descendents was one of the first bass players to show me that you could be in a punk band but still be incredibly gifted at your instrument. Learning his bass-lines as a kid made me an exponentially better musician. The greatest bass player that ever lived is John Paul Jones. He's the all too often forgotten member of Led Zeppelin, but his bass playing (not to mention keyboard playing and arrangements) still blows my mind to this day. We're currently touring the US with Have Mercy and we will be touring the UK with Creeper in December.

www.cantswimmusic.com

GEAR
BASSES Musicman Stingray 5
EFFECTS None
AMPS Engl Ironbass

LAURA FINK 21OCTAYNE

I love music like nothing else in the world, and you can see that when I'm playing. At least, that's what the audience always tell me. For me it's all about the feeling. I play five-string bass, because it just gives me more possibilities. When I started playing the bass, aged 14, I had no idea of gear, really, and my Dad only bought fancy-looking bass guitars for me. My first bass had little skulls as knobs, for example. Soon I started to play a five-string bass because it looked cool and not everyone did it. Since then I've never really gone back to a four-string because I'd be missing something. There is nothing like a good B-string. I listen to different styles of music and love to combine them in my original tracks. Slapping is a unique way of playing the strings, so why not do it? The secret of playing bass well is, in my opinion, being aware of rests and ghost notes. I think it's not about playing fast licks and difficult stuff, but about building a solid foundation together with the drums. For me, the song is always the most important thing. You have to step back when it's necessary (although this is not a typical bass problem). But still, your first job is to groove (did I mention rests and ghost notes here?). My bass heroes are, to name only two, Esperanza Spalding and Marcus Miller. Marcus Miller has the most incredible tone. He's inspiring me a lot. And what Esperanza Spalding is doing while laying down unbelievable bass-lines, is beyond this world. She is an extremely talented artist and singer. A very empowering soul as well. My band has a new album coming out on AFM in the fall. Besides that, we are going to play some shows with Pretty Maids in February and March and are working on further tour dates. We'd love to come to the UK this year, so stay tuned!

www.facebook.com/laura.fink.bass

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GEAR

BASSES Lowendal School, Dresden double bass, circa 1880, Warwick Thumb, Ortega D3NC-4, Epiphone Rivoli, Innovation and Rotosound strings

EFFECTS JLJB Radial PZ-DI, Electro-Harmonix Bass Big Muff Pi, Electro-Harmonix Bass Soul Food, Tone City Sweet Cream, Dr Green Doctors Note, Dr Green Octa Dose, Mooer Ensemble Queen, Marshall Reflector, TC Electronic Flashback Mini, TC Electronic Polytune

AMPS Ampeg B200-R

DUNCAN WILCOX THE JAKE LEG JUG BAND

The variety of genres in our set give me a great opportunity to play many different styles, which is always fun and challenging. It keeps it interesting for the audience and us. I have an endorsement with Innovation double bass strings – they really are great. Playing 1920s and 30s jazz, blues, ragtime and gospel with the Jake Leg Jug Band, it's all about authenticity. Finding a period bass was easy enough (if expensive), but getting that sound without using gut strings was a trick. Gut would have been very difficult to manage and keep in tune as we play so many outdoor summer festivals. Innovation's nylon tapewound strings really capture all that tone without the challenges of organic material. I do not play five- or six-string bass; I feel it completely alters the tone of a band's sound. I like the idea of a low B for example and sometimes that would be nice to go to, but I think with a high C you're playing notes that are getting in the way tonally. I reckon you can cover most things on four strings. I do slap a bit but try to keep it to certain tracks that it really suits. As we are recreating a Prohibition-era image, I'm careful not to overuse it, as on the upright bass it can give the perception of the 50s sound – despite the fact that the style was being used heavily in the period – especially in the late 30s. For me the secret is about holding it all together and keeping the groove going. You should have a sound that cuts through and sonically sits in the mix so that everyone can lock in to it, but should not be pushing too much to the fore. It should drive the song but not be in your face. As an upright player, I am always at ease with my vintage German double bass. I upgraded to it about four years ago and the second I played it in the shop, I knew it was the one for me. However, I have wanted a fretless Warwick Thumb for 20 years and finally managed to acquire one to my exact spec recently – boy, was it worth the wait. It is the most comfortable bass I have ever played and I was stunned by how versatile it is. It cuts through anything, and I know beauty is in the eye of the beholder but come on, is there a better-looking bass out there?

www.thejakelegjugband.com

GEAR

BASSES Höfner Club Ignition, Höfner HCT, Hutchins Chandler

EFFECTS Behringer BDI 21 Bass Amp Modeler, Electro-Harmonix Bass Preacher Compressor, Electro-Harmonix Nano Bass Big Muff Pi

AMPS Ashdown Rootmaster 500w 2x10" combo

ZOË BIGGS THE FRANKLYS

I would describe my bass style as relaxed but effective. I'm fortunate enough to be endorsed by Höfner guitars, and also by Hutchins guitars. It's all about getting the balance right between nailing those timings, being tight with the drummer and just going with your gut instinct and feeling it out. I think I'm naturally more of an instinctive player than a technical virtuoso. I play a bass-line because it feels right, and because it brings something to the song overall. My first bass was a 3/4 size black and white Encore bass, it seemed like the tiniest thing ever but it stood me in good stead for learning on. My favourite bass ever to date is my Höfner Club. I cannot express my love for this instrument enough. Musically and aesthetically it is my ideal and perfect fit. The tone and sounds you can get from it are varied, it's a real workhorse and has served me well over the years. Despite being a hollow body and so lightweight (perfect for live performances and not destroying your neck and shoulder!) if you know how to treat it you can get a big, rich and full sound. The greatest bass player that ever lived is Carol Kaye. She's played on every song you've ever loved, but you never knew it. Her body of work is just outstanding. If I could get the bass tone of any album ever released, I would choose Krist Novoselic's on Nirvana's *Nevermind*. Deep, dirty, heavy and gritty. It doesn't overpower but rather adds to the songs, and you'd sure notice if it was missing. We recently released our debut album *Are You Listening?* back in June this year, and have received some great feedback and support from this. We recorded it at Fish Factory studios in London with Sean Douglas, who is also a bassist so it was winning all round! I was even lucky enough to record some parts with a 1977 Fender Precision, which gave it some amazing character and tone.

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GEAR OF THE MONTH

In which three renowned gear experts nominate their bass, amp and effects unit of the month. Whether new or old, cheap or pricey, simple or complex, this gear has earned its place in our affections through simply being brilliant...

BASS

Once Billy Sheehan retired his legendary Fender Precision of many years from live performance, the process began to find its successor. After he linked up with Yamaha in the mid-80s, having undertaken some DIY work on various Yamaha basses, in 1989 the Attitude bass was unveiled. Its Sheehan-isms are immediately obvious for all to see, with large position markers, scalloped frets in the upper region of the neck, stereo split-coil and woofer pickups and a Hipshot detuner. The Sheehan tone is unmistakable, and although the bass won't give you Billy's musicianship and expertise, it is clear that the bass itself is responsible for a significant part of his signature sound. The broad, deep Telecaster-style neck is enticing, while the controls for volume, tone (with a switch for high-cut) and volume (plus a switch for mono operation) take a little getting used to, but it all makes sense once you familiarise yourself with the effect of each control. Available in an array of colours and finishes, this Limited II model has now been superseded by the LTD 3, which features some hardware and construction improvements, especially in the neck attachment. The Limited II is still a fine, roadworthy beast, though... just ask Billy!

Mike Brooks

AMP

If you were looking to blow your record company advance on a 'money no object' pro bass amp 10 years ago, the flagship Eden WT800 World Tour head would definitely have been on your radar. This rack-mount tube hybrid amp from the Minnesota-based company is basically two 440-watt amps in one box, enabling you to run separate outputs for high and low frequencies or bridge both sides together for a mighty 800 watts mono. You can adjust the crossover point from the front panel. The WT800 is packed with features that made it unbeatable for the touring pro bassist of the time, including a five-way parametric EQ, a simple compressor and Eden's 'enhance' control, with which you can adjust the amount of EQ sweep. There's also an impressive array of effects inputs and routing options. If your budget didn't quite run to the WT800, there was the simplified mono WT500, and also the preamp-only WP100 which was popular with studio bassists. Following the purchase of Eden by Marshall in 2012, the WT800 was superseded by the World Tour Pro WTP900, which is still currently in production.

Kev Sanders

FX UNIT

Perhaps the purest of all pedals, the volume pedal is one that seems to exist at the extremes – it's either completely overlooked or indispensable. For many decades the trend has been towards ever bigger and heavier volume pedals, designed to withstand abuse on tour and be visible from the other side of the stage at Wembley Stadium. But for musicians who routinely take budget flights to get to gigs, every inch and every extra ounce of gear counts, so it is for us that Dunlop introduced the DVP4 Dunlop Volume mini volume pedal. Built to the same rugged standards as its larger siblings, the mini volume goes beyond miniaturisation and is instead redesigned to make sure the full throw of the volume pedal is still usable. It's heavy enough that it won't roll around the stage as you move, but small enough to be mounted on your mini travel pedalboard. What's more, it's got a socket which

> "BUILT TO THE SAME RUGGED STANDARDS AS ITS LARGER SIBLINGS, THE MINI VOLUME GOES BEYOND MINIATURISATION AND IS INSTEAD REDESIGNED TO MAKE SURE THE FULL THROW OF THE VOLUME PEDAL IS STILL USABLE"

transforms it to a CC/expression pedal if you've got pedals or MIDI gear equipped to take that kind of signal. If, like me, you're one of the legions of players who hate to play without a volume pedal as the first thing the bass signal hits on its way to the amp, this pocket-sized gem will be a godsend. Try it out.

Steve Lawson

POWER BASS

Warming up before a long performance could reduce injury risk, says bassist and physiotherapist Ben Whybrow. Read on and stay on top form

"I know I *should* warm up..." is a phrase I frequently hear from musicians, but there's a huge number of online and text resources about how to actually do this. Suggestions vary from performing arpeggios and scales to executing stretches and press-ups. Doing all those things could leave you warming up longer than you actually play – and you'd be pretty bored as well!

Do I really need to warm up?
Let's be realistic: if you're planning to play bass for five or 10 minutes while watching TV, a warm-up isn't necessary. However, warming up before a full-length gig or practice session is generally advised, not just for reducing the risk of injury, but for a better performance too.

Will warming up reduce my injury risk?
We think so, although the data is scarce. Research in sport has found that a sufficient warm-up of 15 to 20 minutes reduces the risk of lower limb injury in team sports, and recent research has found the same for shoulder injuries in handball athletes. Research of the same extent and quality has yet to be done in musicians, although a couple of smaller studies with regular warm-ups as part of an overall injury risk reduction programme have shown potential.

What's the best warm-up for reducing injury risk?
Often the most effective warm-ups for reducing injury risk are those containing a variety of different exercise types (strength, balance, stretching, technique etc), while those focusing on an individual type of exercise are less effective at reducing injury risk compared to multi-dimensional warm-ups. For bassists, this means that warming up should be done both on and off the fretboard and should take place around 10 to 15 minutes before a long performance or practice session.

Fretboard activities would include scales, arpeggios, technical drills, improvisations or simply playing through an actual piece. Off-fretboard activities can cover a whole variety of options. Stretching is popular and probably the most common warm-up. These can either be done statically, where you hold a position for 20-30 seconds, or dynamically for the same time period by repeatedly moving in and out of the stretch position. This gets your blood flowing faster, warmer and quicker.

Resistance exercise, whether that means bodyweight exercises such as press-ups, planks and squats, or using the bass or amp as a weight to do lunges and bicep curls, will prepare you for throwing a heavy bass around. Cardiovascular exercise will prepare your heart and lungs for a lively performance and help calm any nerves: this could mean going for a jog, hopping on a bike, or doing star jumps and the dreaded burpees.

What else takes your fancy? Handstands, ping pong, wrestling... the more variety the better for those 10 to 15 minutes, and remember, not only will warming up help reduce your injury risk, it may well improve your performance too.

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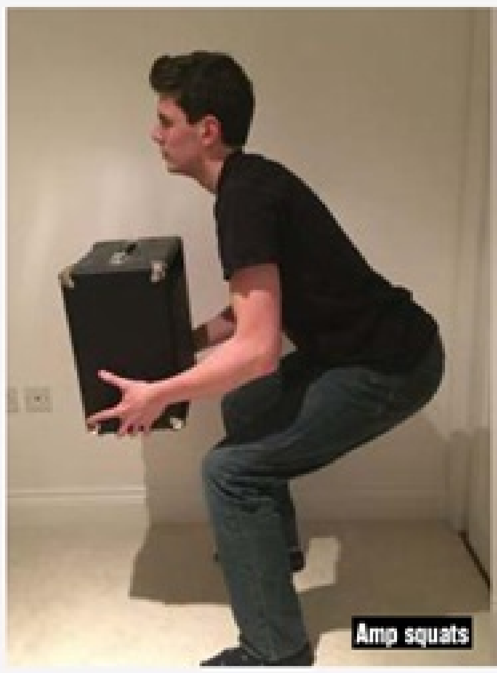
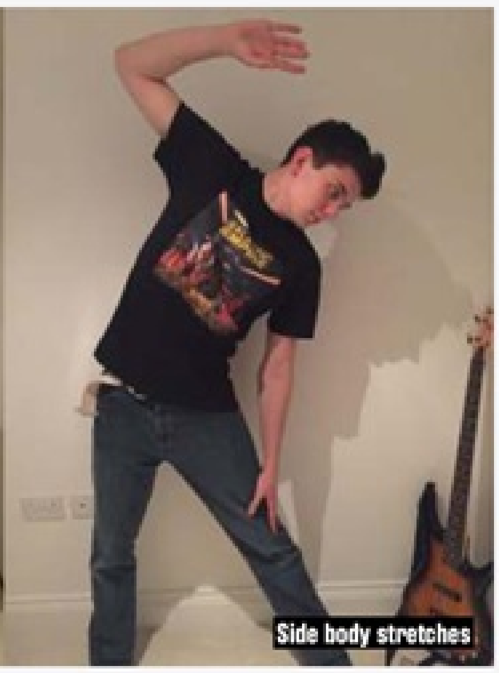
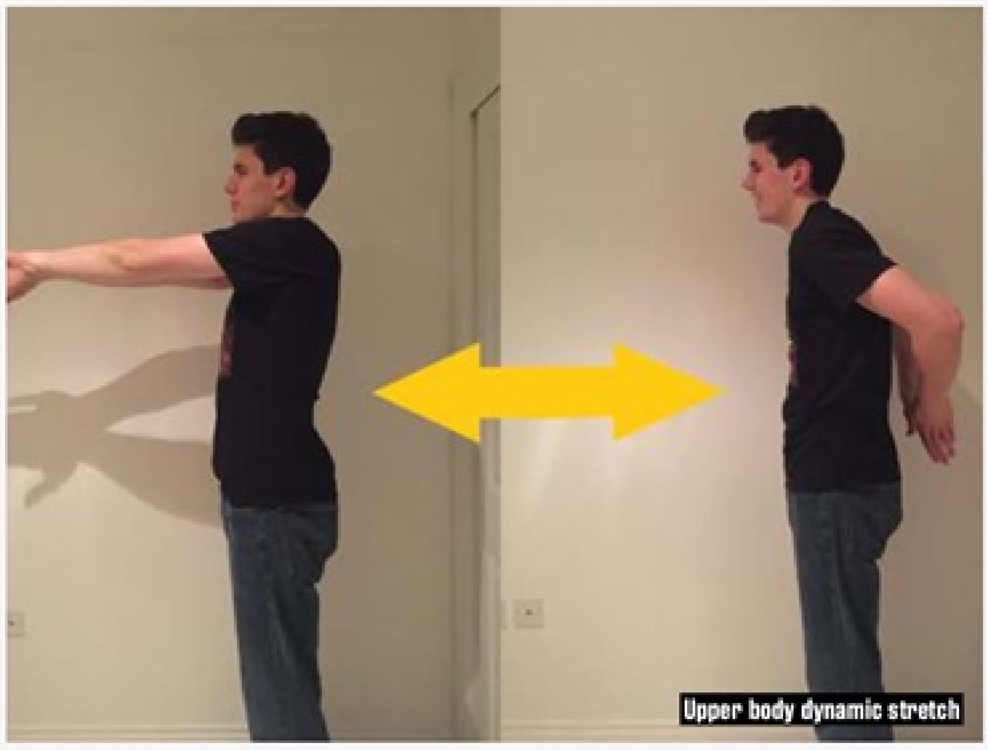
Bicep curl


Amp squats


Side body stretches


Upper body dynamic stretch

rockschool

APPLIED IMPROVISATION WITH ROCKSCHOOL

Diving into an A minor tumbao study with Rockschool's Nik Preston

Welcome back, guys! A break with the harmonic and melodic this month, and a look at some fundamental rhythmic content.

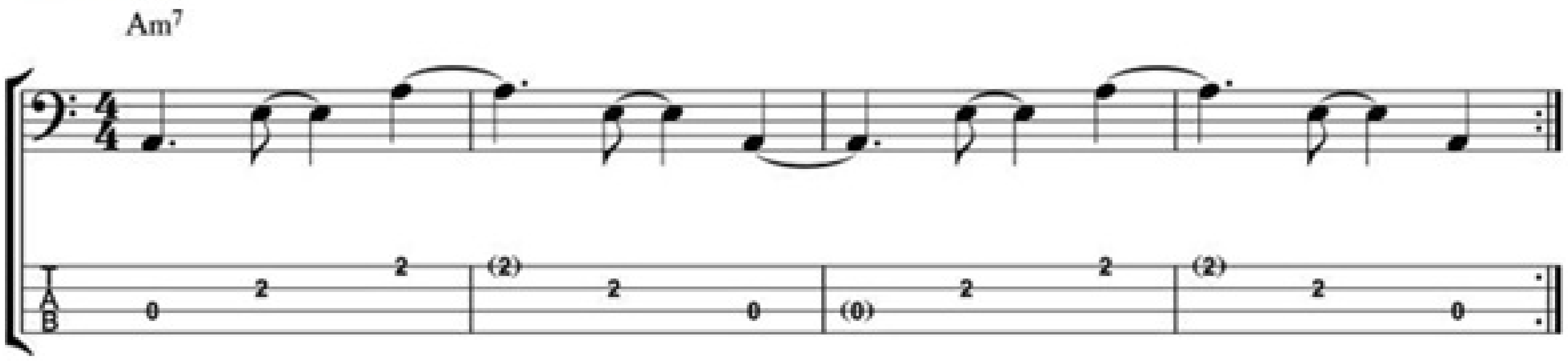
Afro-Cuban music isn't always the mainstay of the aspiring western bassist, but the rhythmic insight it can offer, with only a relatively small amount of study, can be invaluable. The staple groove for many bassists first starting to study Afro-Cuban styles is the 'tumbao', and you can see two versions over an A minor chord in this month's column.

Playing tumbao for the first time can be unsettling for bassists brought up on Western popular music as it doesn't always outline the chord by playing the root on beat one! What is this devilry, I hear you ask? Well, the root is often heard on beat four, where it acts as an anticipation of beat one. This is then followed by having another chord tone, often the fifth, on the 'and' of beat two. Over static chords you will often hear a two-bar loop, which can be developed at will by experienced players.

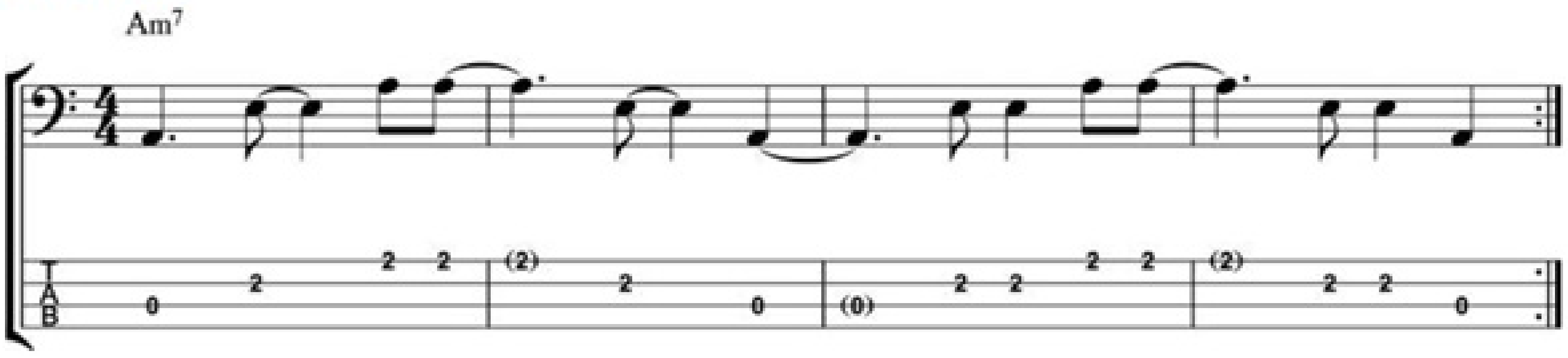
Example 1 shows a basic tumbao over A minor for four bars. **Example 2** shows a slightly developed groove featuring two eighth notes on either the fifth, or the root. Be prepared to play both four-bar versions for a long time to begin with, with no embellishments: it really pays off.

Examples 3 and **4** show a rhythmic figure called a 'clave', which is Spanish for key. This is a figure played historically by two wooden blocks called claves and provides a rhythmic template for the piece or passage being performed. **Figure 3** shows the 2:3 son clave and **Figure 4** shows a 3:2 rumba clave. You may well come across either of these figures in their inverted form: 3:2 son or 3:2 rumba.

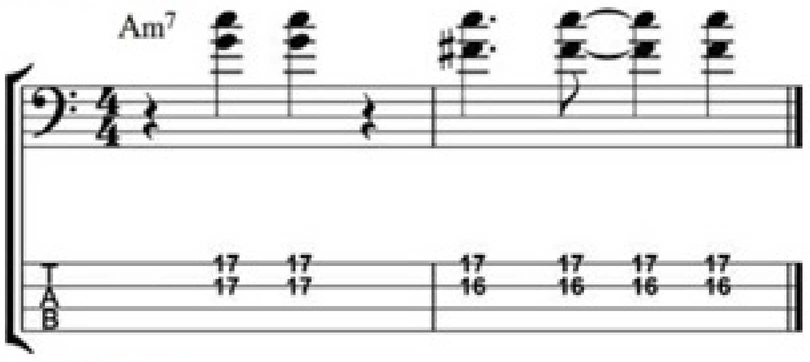
EXAMPLE 1



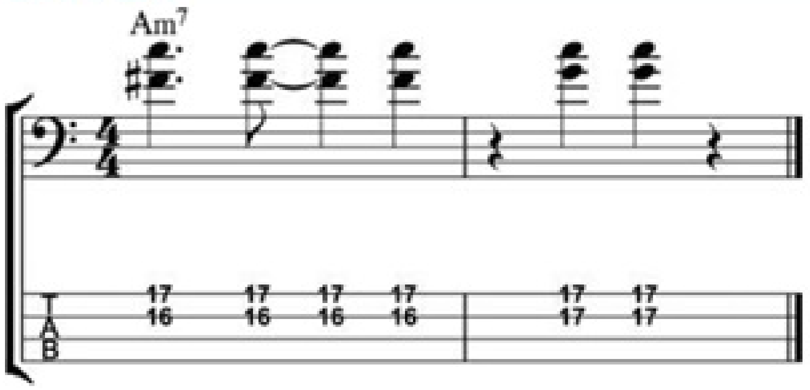
EXAMPLE 2



EXAMPLE 3



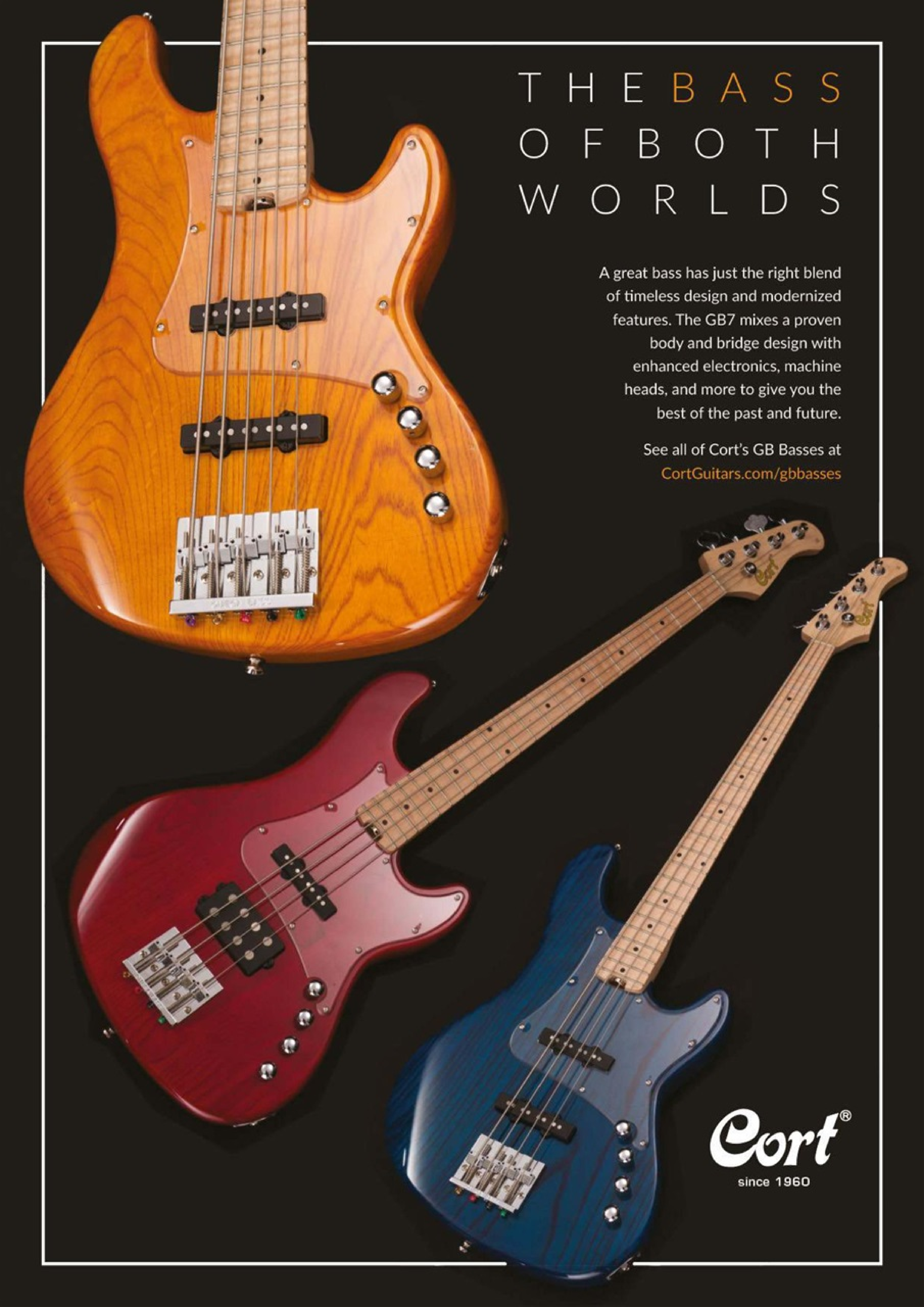
EXAMPLE 4



You will find many modern kit drummers playing Afro-Cuban grooves and solos while playing the clave part with their left foot on either hi-hats or their bass drum beater on the cowbell. Spare a thought for these guys when you're first struggling with only playing the tumbao!

I've included the clave parts here, not only because it provides some more insight into the style, but also because if you can tap the clave part with your foot while playing the tumbao on the bass, you will have definitely improved your rhythmic independence. Be warned, it's definitely worth taking this one slowly at first…

If this style of playing is new to you, it is definitely worth checking out Israel 'Cachao' López, Orlando 'Cachaito' López and Lincoln Goines, whose book with Robby Ameen, Funkifying The Clave, is a fantastic introduction. If you can become fluent at playing this kind of groove, at a variety of tempos, your sense of groove in other styles will often develop quickly. Plus, it's just great fun!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NO TREBLE

Kevin Johnson of No Treble checks in from across the pond

This was another month of shakeups for the bass community. The No Treble community was saddened to learn of the passing of bassist and songwriter Jack Conrad, who was a staple of the Los Angeles scene in the 60s and 70s. After recording with Petula Clark and Paul Williams, Conrad became best known for joining the Doors after Jim Morrison's death. His bass-lines can be heard on their albums *Other Voices* and *Full Circle*. Although other session aces also played on the records, it was Conrad that the band tapped to join them for live performances including their 1972 return to television on *Beat Club*. His songwriting credits include work with Three Dog Night, Dave Mason, the Babys, Heart, and more.

Another loss this month was the announcement that Carvin Audio would be shutting their doors after seven decades in business. The California-based company built bass and guitar amps as well as pro audio gear. Their first tube amps were introduced in 1948 with the first dedicated bass amps appearing in the 1960s. "We are thankful for the many years we've had in this business and the support you all have given us," Carvin wrote in a statement. "We'd like to thank all of you for your devotion to our gear and championing us live, in the studio, and on social media. We hope to see our gear live on in your musical lives for many years to come!" Many bassists will also remember Carvin for their guitars, however that portion of the company split off to become Kiesel Guitars in 2015. Kiesel Guitars is unaffected by Carvin's closing and will continue operations as normal.

Most of the good news this month came from new gear. Geezer Butler jumped the gun on revealing his new signature amp from Ashdown Engineering. Offering a very appropriate 666 watts of power, the Head Of Doom is based on Ashdown's ABM series with extra bells and whistles to fit the Black Sabbath bassist's needs. That includes two of their iconic VU meters (one for input and one for output) and a Doom knob that controls how much current is sent to its 12AX7 preamp tube. Other features include a sub-harmonic generator, an effects loop, and three dedicated transformer isolated outputs with the option to slave from a dedicated slave input.

"This feature was added so Geezer could power his 12 onstage cabinets, ensuring the quality of signal was maintained," Ashdown explains. It's perfect for blowing up your coffeehouse gig... Other goodies this month were the Eastwood Airline Pocket bass reissue, the De Gier Lowlander bass, and a very special Fodera Zebrawood AJ Contrabass Shape 12 Elite. Check in next month for more from No Treble!

www.notreble.com

BASSCHAT

Choosing new material with Basschat's Silvia Bluejay

Most Basschat members gig regularly and, as we previously noted in this column, take great care of their setlists. But no matter how perfectly honed your band's setlist is, there comes a time when it begins to feel stale and spoil the fun for both the band and its followers. How do you choose new material to freshen up your performance? What's the best way to add new tracks and drop old ones? We have been comparing notes on a recent General Discussion thread.

Bands usually have a fairly clear idea of the aim of their performance: keeping the audience dancing, tapping their foot or singing along all evening, entertaining the crowd with relatively obscure but high-quality covers, or showcasing original songs and selling CDs and merch. Any new material will usually have to fall in line, as well as being possible to perform on the instruments available. But who has the privilege – or indeed the onus – of suggesting new tracks?

Some bands are run a bit like an enlightened monarchy, with one member who acts as music director and takes the crucial decisions: perhaps the singer, whose vocal range will necessarily dictate some of the choices, or maybe the songwriting guitarist or keyboard player. Others are a democracy: each member suggests their favourite songs, or their own compositions, and submits them for approval, and everybody has the right of veto (albeit within limits). There are advantages and drawbacks to each system. One drawback common to both systems is that each musician will always end up having to play at least some songs they don't like!

One crucial consideration for the band, or its MD, in choosing new material is hitting the right balance between it being liked by the audience – or written with them firmly in mind – and it being primarily fun to play for the band. Although the two aspects aren't necessarily incompatible at first, they may well become so with time and familiarity. Some Basschatters are firmly in the 'audience always comes first' camp, and are happy to be bored on stage, if necessary, as long as the crowd enjoy themselves. Others suggest arranging much-loved-but-hackneyed covers in a different style, such as funk or rock; that way, they'll still be crowd-pleasers, but also feel fresher for everybody. (Unless, of course, the punters decide they're actually not pleased at all, and simply sit in silence, staring disapprovingly at the musicians.)

Basschatters who play in originals bands are less worried, know that a large percentage of the audience won't have heard their songs before anyway, and believe that it's the duty of songwriters not to re-hash the same old tunes, and instead drive music forward. If the punters don't dance or sing along, but come to shake hands and buy CDs and merch after the gig, what's not to like? Whichever the selection method, and whether the new material is covers or original songs, many on Basschat have come to the same conclusion: more often than not, bands will find that their carefully chosen new tracks are a hit with audiences they never targeted or never thought would appreciate, and conversely fall flat in front of crowds they thought they were perfect for. Perhaps it's this complete lack of predictability that ultimately keeps us on our toes, even when we feel terminally bored while playing 'Brown Sugar' for the millionth time.

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16608 - Cort B4 Plus Artisan 4-String Lefthanded
16396 - Cort GB74JJ AB Aqua Blue
15242 - Cort Jeff Berlin Rithimic 5 String Bass

Fender

16413 - Fender Aerodyne Jazz Bass Black
16606 - Fender Am Elite Jazz Bass, Ocean Turq.
15830 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Sunburst
16450 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass, Natural
15951 - Fender American Pro P Bass Olympic White
15354 - Fender American Vintage '74 Jazz Bass,S/burst
15533 - Fender Flea Jazz Bass, Shell Pink
16448 - Fender Geddy Lee Jazz Bass, Black
16414 - Fender FSR Jap JB62 60s J Bass Walnut
15686 - Fender Mustang Bass PJ, Sonic Blue
8929 - Fender Roger Waters Precision Bass
16596 - Fender Standard Jazz Bass, Black, MF
16595 - Fender Std MIM Jazz Bass Candy Apple Red
16263 - Fender Standard P Bass, Brown Sunburst
11069 - G&L Tribute L2000 4 String In Blueburst
11189 - Hofner HCT Shorty Bass, Black
12188 - Hofner Ignition Violin Bass, Sunburst
4175 - Marleaux B Votan 4, White
14167 - Marleaux Votan XS Deluxe, Blue
16731 - Marvit Apoli PJ4C 4 String Bass, Used

MUSIC MAN

16236 - MusicMan Caprice, Heritage Tobacco Burst
15941 - Musicman Cutlass Bass, Heritage TobBurst
16762 - PRS SE Kestrel Electric Bass, Black
14367 - PRS SE Kingfisher Bass, Natural
16761 - PRS SE Kingfisher Bass, Tortoise Shell
6919 - Rickenbacker 4003, Mapleglo
16421 - Rickenbacker 4003 Bass, Fireglo
7890 - Rickenbacker 4003, Jetglo

Spector

11197 - Spector Bass Performer 4, Red
14105 - Spector Legend Standard 4 Blue Stain
16680 - Squier Affinity P Bass PJ Pack, Black
16681 - Squier Affinity P Bass PJ Pack, S.Burst
16175 - Squier Bronco Bass, Black
16567 - Squier Classic Vibe P Bass 70s, Black
7138 - Squier Vintage Modified Jaguar, Black
16569 - Squier Vintage Mod Jazz Bass 70s, Nat
15890 - Tokai Jazz Sound Bass, Secondhand

WestCoast

6446 - Westcoast BG4 Neck Thru Body, Brown
8437 - Westcoast JP1 4 String Bass in Trans Red

YAMAHA

14836 - Yamaha 2024 Bass, Sunburst, Secondhand
5634 - Yamaha BB714BS Billy Sheehan, Lava Red
15998 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, OVSunburst
15997 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Electric Bass
15996 - Yamaha TRBX204 4-String Bass, Black
13138 - Yamaha TRBX304 4 String Bass In White
15999 - Yamaha TRBX504 Bass, Trans White

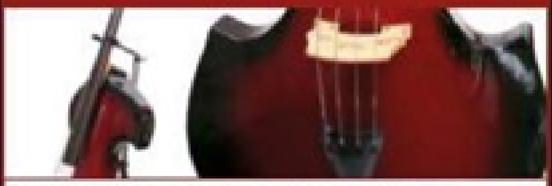
5 String Basses

15983 - Fender American Pro Jazz Bass V, Black
15363 - Cort A5 Ultra Artisan 5-String Bass, Nat
15725 - Cort Action DLX 5 FGB Faded Grey Burst
14312 - Cort Action V-DLX, Cherry Red Sunburst
12538 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Open Pore Nat.
16526 - Cort GB75 5 String Bass, Black
16397 - Cort GB75JJ Amber Glossy 5 String Bass
15844 - Fender 5-String Jazz Bass, Blue, Used
15530 - Fender Deluxe Active Jazz Bass V, Black
16734 - Fender Dlx Active Jazz Bass V, Sunburst
13117 - Fender Deluxe Dimension Bass V Natural
15265 - G&L Tribute L2500 5 String, Blueburst
16744 - Ibanez SR30TH5 NNF
16766 - Ibanez SR30TH5PII Premium, 5-String Bass
16768 - Ibanez SR805 5-String Bass, Amber
15407 - Marleaux Contra 5, Old Violin Finish
16288 - Overwater Progress Deluxe 5, Pre-Owned
16683 - Peavey USA Cirrus 5, Bubinga, Secondhand
10960 - Pedulla Rapture Fretted 5-String Bass
16120 - Shuker Horn Bass, Trans Turqoise, Used
15343 - Spector Bass Legend 5 Custom Bubinga
16329 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Black Cherry Stain
16773 - Spector Coda 5 Pro Trans Black
12406 - Spector Legend Custom 5 String, Amber
11195 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5 in Black
16776 - Spector SP5BK Performer 5, Black Cherry
15797 - Squier Deluxe Dimension Bass V, Sunburst
9351 - Yamaha BB425 5 String Bass, Black, Used
8999 - Yamaha RBX5A2 5 String Bass, Black
13193 - Yamaha TRB1005J Bass, Black
16000 - Yamaha TRBX505 Bass

Acoustic Basses

10498 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Black
15771 - Ortega D Walker Acoustic Bass, Mahog.
15117 - Takamine GB30CE Electro Acoustic Blck
14263 - Takamine GB72CE Jumbo Cutaway

Electric Upright Basses



4910 - Bridge Cetus Electric Double Bass
5110 - NS Design NXT Electric Double Bass
14482 - NS Design NXT Electric Double, Black
6360 - Yamaha SLB200 Silent Double Bass

Fretless Basses

16769 - Cort B4 FL Plus AS OPN Fretless Bass
13371 - Squier Vintage Modified Fretless Bass
5719 - Squier Vint Mod 4 Fretless Jazz

String Deals

2 Sets of Elite (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Elite (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (4 String) £25 inc P&P
2 Sets of Rotosound (5 String) £30 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £35 inc P&P
2 Sets of D'Addario (4 String) £40 inc P&P

Bass Combos

13577 - AER Amp III Bass Amp Combo
5627 - AER Amp One (200W, 1x10)

15190 - Ashdown AAA 30 8 30w 1 x 8" Combo
15187 - Ashdown AAA 300 210T 300w 2 x 10"
15189 - Ashdown AAA 60 10T 60w 1 x 10" Combo
15953 - Ashdown ABM410 Bass Combo, S/hand
8714 - Ashdown After Eight 20 Bass Combo
15192 - Ashdown B-Social Bass Amp & Bluetooth
8750 - Ashdown Perfect Ten Bass Combo
15182 - Ashdown RM C112T 500 EVO 500w 1x12
15180 - Ashdown RMC115T 500 500w 1x15 Bass
15181 - Ashdown RMC210T500 EVO 500w 2x10"
13905 - Blackstar ID Core BEAM Bluetooth Amp

EDEN

12431 - Eden EC210 2 x 10 Bass Amp Combo
13375 - Eden EC28 Bass Amp Combo
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
16046 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo
16028 - Eich BC112 Bass Combo

Fender

12686 - Fender Bronco 40 Bass Amp
13497 - Fender Rumble 100 Bass Amp Combo
4238 - Fender Rumble 15 (15W, 1x8)
12745 - Fender Rumble 200 Bass Combo
15113 - Fender Rumble 25 Bass Amp Combo
13083 - Fender Rumble 40 Bass Amp Combo
15114 - Fender Rumble 500 Bass Amp Combo
16765 - Gallien Krueger MB110 Bass Combo
16446 - Gallien Krueger MB150S/112 Combo

Hartke

14095 - Hartke HD150 Bass Combo
9279 - Hartke Kickback 15 Bass Amp Combo

Mark bass

9004 - Markbass 121 Lite Alain Caron Combo
6239 - Mark Bass CMD102P Bass Combo
5472 - Mark Bass CMD151P J Berlin (300W,1x15)
6240 - Mark Bass Mini CMD121P (300W, 1x12)
5474 - Mark Bass Mini CMD151P (300W, 1x15W)
5475 - Mark Bass CMD121H (300W, 1x12)
9940 - Markbass Mini CMD 151 Jeff Berlin Combo
16764 - Markbass 102 250 Richard Bona Combo
9938 - MicroMark 801 Bass Combo

ORANGE

15715 - Orange Crush Bass 100 Bass Combo
15716 - Orange Crush Bass 25 Bass Combo
15714 - Orange Crush Bass 50 Bass Combo
15111 - Orange OB1 300 Combo

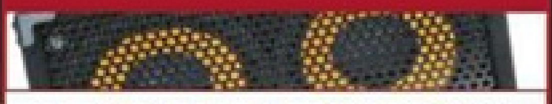
Roland

6320 - Roland CB100 (100W, 1x12)
4433 - Roland CB120XL Cube 120X (120w, 1x12)
4435 - Roland Cube 20XL BASS (20W, 1x8)
4434 - Roland Cube 60XL (60W, 1x10)
5678 - Roland Microcube Bass RX, (5W, 4x4)
16758 - Vox Adio Air BS Bass Guitar Amp
16470 - Vox VX50BA Bass Amp Combo

Bass Heads

5176 - Ashdown ABM1200-EVO IV 1200w Bass Head
14618 - Aguilar Tone Hammer 500 Bass Amp Head
15115 - ABM 600 EVO IV 600W Ashdown Bass Head
15177 - Ashdown ABM600RC EVO IV 600W Rack
14553 - Ashdown Retroglide 800 Compact Bass Head
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13198 - Eden WTX500 Bass Amp Head
16340 - Eden WTX500 Bass Amp Head Used
16044 - Eich T1000 Bass Amp
16043 - Eich T300 Bass Amp
16027 - Eich T500 Bass Amp
16026 - Eich T900 Bass Amp
15484 - Fender Bass Man 800
16318 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Bass Amp Head
16319 - Gallien Krueger MB500 Fusion Bass Amp H
9349 - Harke HA2500 Bass Head
9027 - Harke Klio 1000 Bass Head
12382 - Hartke LH1000 Bass Head
16339 - Hartke LH1000 Bass Head, Used
15588 - Hartke TX600 Bass Amplifier
14828 - Mark Bass Nano Mark 300 Bass Amp Head
10408 - MarkBass Bass MultiAmp Stereo
6243 - Mark Bass Little Mark III Bass Head 500w
9035 - Markbass Little Mark III Tube Bass Head
5244 - MarkBass Little Mark Tube 800, 800W
7962 - Markbass TTE500 Randy Jackson Bass Head
9941 - Markbass Little Mark 250 Head Black
15271 - Markbass Little Mark Ninja Bona Head
9944 - Markbass MultiAmp
15151 - Markbass Randy Jackson TTE501 Bass Head
9725 - Markbass TTE801 Randy Jackson Bass Head
15109 - Orange 4 Stroke 300 Bass Amp
15110 - Orange 4 Stroke 500 Bass Amp
6261 - Orange AD200 MK3
8231 - Orange Dark Terror Valve Guitar Head
16531 - Trace Elliot Elf 200 Watt Bass Amp Head

Bass Cabinets



13640 - Aguilar SL112 Bass Cabinet
5677 - Ashdown ABM810 (8x10)
6457 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15)
15766 - Ashdown ABM115 Compact (1x15) Used
15178 - Ashdown ABM210H EVO IV 300w 2 x 10"
15460 - Ashdown ABM210H NEO
6456 - Ashdown ABM410H (4x10)
6450 - Ashdown MAG410T Deep (4x10)
15185 - Ashdown RM210T EVO 300w 2 x 10" Cab
15183 - Ashdown RM 112T EVO 300w 1 x 12" Cab
15184 - Ashdown RM 115T EVO 300w 1 x 15" Cab
15186 - Ashdown RM 610T EVO 900w 6 x 10" Cab
14196 - Blackstar HT Metal 412A Extension Cab
13566 - Eden EGRW1264 Head & Cab Package
13195 - Eden EX210 Bass Cab
16054 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16055 - Eich 110XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16041 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohms
16042 - Eich 112XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohms
16075 - Eich 115L Bass Cabinet
16052 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16053 - Eich 115XS Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16039 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16040 - Eich 1210S Bass Cabinet
16071 - Eich 210M Bass Cabinet
16069 - Eich 212L Bass Cabinet
16070 - Eich 212M Bass Cabinet
16048 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 4 Ohm
16050 - Eich 212S Bass Cabinet 8 Ohm
16068 - Eich 410L Bass Cabinet
16067 - Eich 610L Bass Cabinet
16061 - Eich 612XL Bass Cab
16065 - Eich 810L Bass Cabinet
16321 - Gallien Krueger CX115 Bass Cabinet
16444 - Gallien Krueger CX210 Bass Cab
16320 - Gallien Krueger MB210 Bass Amp Combo
14254 - Hartke 210XL 2 x 10" Bass Cab
5476 - Mark Bass STD104HR (4x10)
6241 - Mark Bass STD102HF (2x10)
6242 - Mark Bass STD104HF (4x10)
5477 - Mark Bass STD151HR (1x15)
9033 - Markbass Traveler 121H Bass Ext Cab
9034 - Markbass Traveler 151 P Bass Guitar Cab
4733 - Mark Bass Traveller TRV102P (2x10)
16013 - Markbass 123 Alain Caron Bass Cab
16014 - Markbass CMD Combo K1 Alain Caron
5431 - Mark Bass NY121 New York 1x 12 Bass Cab
10412 - Markbass NY122 2 x 12 Bass Cab
10409 - Markbass NY151 1 x 15 Bass Cab
10410 - Markbass NY151 RJ 1 x 15" Randy Jackson
15272 - Markbass New York 122 Ninja Bona Cab
6259 - Orange OBC115 (1x15)
6260 - Orange OBC410H (4x10)
5241 - Orange OBC810 (8x10)

For full guitar details, pricing and photos, enter the number next to each guitar model into our SKU search facility on the website.

"AS A BASSIST, YOU SHOULD BE THE PERFECT BRIDGE BETWEEN THE RHYTHM AND THE COLOUR"

A KIND OF MAGIC

Heavy rock. Heavy metal. Pop-rock? Def Leppard bassist Rick 'Sav' Savage has heard it all, played it all and sold millions of copies of his band's music. Whatever it is, it has enduring power, he tells Amit Sharma

Pics: Tina Korhonen

Def Leppard's Rick Savage had already been on holiday and settled back in Dublin, where he was living in 1987, when he got the phone call from singer Joe Elliott requesting his presence back at Holland's Wisseloord Studios – for one last-minute addition to their fourth studio album, *Hysteria*. The song in question, 'Pour Some Sugar On Me', would prove to be one of the biggest guitar-driven singles of its era and set the rising Sheffield rockers to globe-dominating heights.

"As far as I was concerned, I had retired and washed my hands of the album, awaiting news of how the mixes were going," chortles Savage, speaking to *BGM* on a rainy afternoon at his record label's HQ in Kensington, London. Seated in the recording studio downstairs, surrounded by a maze of faders as well as stacks of pedals and vinyl, it seems a fitting environment to meet with a founding member of such a production-led band…

"It all happened because [legendary rock producer] Mutt Lange heard something there that the album didn't have," continues Savage, with a typically open and honest Yorkshire drawl. "We reconvened back in the studio and finished the song in about four days… which is interesting, considering the album took five years to make! You can imagine how happy the label were to hear we were recording another song, ha ha!"

Now celebrating its 30th anniversary, Def Leppard's fourth full-length stands as one of the finest rock releases of all time – a perfect storm of futuristic production, earworm melodies, gripping chord movements and tasteful technicalities. Despite the long, hard road to get there – setbacks including drummer Rick Allen losing his left arm following a car accident – and with no fewer than seven hit singles, from synth-driven anthems like 'Women' and 'Rocket' to the album's title ballad, *Hysteria* turned the Sheffield quintet into the biggest rock band in the world. All these years later, they're still up there, headlining festivals and stadiums wherever they roam.

"Making rock music is just our instinct," reveals Savage, when asked about the magic behind these chart-conquering rock epics. "But it was coming up with songs and arrangements that transcended the rock attitude, without straying from the

format, that made Def Leppard. We got into a mindspace of not writing verses that went straight to the chorus, which bands still do today. I'd say we almost pioneered the idea of tricking people into thinking they were hearing a chorus before it would actually come. We'd have a bucket full of great eight-bar ideas and someone like Mutt, with the mental proficiency and bigger picture, would know which of them to glue together – sometimes creating progressions or key changes you never would have naturally written. These different ideas on offer created something above the norm. Quite often it didn't work, it would sound bloody stupid…"

He trails off and pauses for a second.

"But when it *did* work, it was unbelievable!" he continues, with a boyish grin. "'Animal' is a great example, where you get locked into these Bb, C and D chords and then all of a sudden everything moves up a semitone, which catches your attention. It would somehow lead naturally into the chorus, ending with an A chord then go back to Bb, which makes you go 'What?' but in a nice way. It's not being musically different for the sake of it. We never wanted to be fashionable – even when we were semi-fashionable, the intention was never like that. We didn't go out of style or out of the cool list because we were never there in the first place! Even now, we're not sure what kind of image to project or what we should be wearing. We've always been uncomfortable with that, to a certain extent. But give us an acoustic guitar and a piano, and we're completely at home… we'll write you a couple of songs in an hour!"

Being one of the songwriters, and even playing guitar on the album's title track ("the others didn't have the right feel, so Mutt said, 'It's your riff – you play it!') gave Savage a birds-eye perspective of what was required from him to make *Hysteria*'s 12 songs the very best they could be. From the off, Def Leppard set out to make their 'greatest hits' in just one standalone release and their mission was a resounding success – thanks to knowing how to play on their strengths.

"You can't have everybody fighting for the spotlight," says Savage, shaking his head. "For example, for those first six Queen albums, I was one of their biggest fans on Earth. John Deacon is right up there for me – with a brilliant mix of melodic lines that never ever trampled on the song. Similarly, I always felt Sting was great for that too, because he let the song breathe without going overboard. It helped that he was the singer, because I think he was more conscious of not walking over his vocal ideas.

"As a bassist, you should be the perfect bridge between the rhythm and the colour," Savage reflects. "That's just doing your job and all anyone can ask for. I'd probably be the least important member from an individual point of view – I've always felt if I can make the guitars sound as good as possible, I'm happy. People want to hear the harmonies and the lead singer. Sometimes I see someone digging in on the bass too much and feel like they're at the wrong gig. As I'm a guitar player myself, I can think, 'How would I want my bassist to play this?' If that means staying on a groove and not moving much melodically, then do it… because two guitar players can sound amazing."

© Getty

Sav at Wembley Arena on the Hysteria tour in 1988. Can you name that bass?

"SOMETIMES I SEE PEOPLE DIGGING IN ON THE BASS TOO MUCH AND FEEL LIKE THEY'RE AT THE WRONG GIG"

To some of the more technically ambitious players out there, that may perhaps sound like sacrilege, but for Savage, the song always comes first – and it's a formula that's been working out well for him for quite some time. Then, of course, there are the other advantages that come hand-in-hand with the 'less is more' approach…

"Some of the stuff we do is very simple on paper. The melody doesn't move," he shrugs. "I might be playing an A note for 16 or 24 bars, so I'll be waving at the crowd with my free hand, just gesturing to people. It's a bit more showman-like, because I would get awfully bored doing it stood by the hi-hat. I've got to have fun! As a result, I'm a very aggressive player. I hold the plectrum in such a way that it almost scratches the string. It's not a clean pluck, more like a scrape, so when you play eighth notes, you get the bottom end and a sheen on top – almost like a bass keyboard. It's a little more rounded and bigger."

Having reissued their bestseller earlier in the year and now with plans to perform the album in its entirety over 2018, Steel

Jackson

City's finest are gearing up for big things. On stage, they've never cared for the variables. The Def Leppard live experience is one built on consistency, which is why their bassist eschews advanced circuitry or spaceship pedalboards in favour of a more streamlined and dependable signal path. For the best part of a decade, he's been using Jackson five-strings, most notably his custom white, grey and black negative Union Jack XB925.

"We have a lot of live presets, so I don't want to be tied down to a pedalboard. I'd probably be crap at it," he chuckles. "If anyone's gonna fuck up, I'd rather someone else get the blame. I think a lot of bass players are more artistic than I would be from a musicianship point of view. I'm not one to think, 'It's a slightly brighter hall tonight, so I'd better mess with the EQs!' Let the guy out front worry about that – we've got the best in the business! The two main Jackson guitars I use are just a piece of wood, electrified. It's way less complicated and our sound engineer prefers them too. It came through an association via Phil [Collen, Leppard guitarist], because he's used their guitars for a long time. I fell in love with the five-strings straight away – the neck wasn't overly demanding. Some bass necks get a bit too broad, and I don't have the biggest fingers. It was as simple as saying, 'I love it, can you make me some more?'"

The rest of the tone comes from the Gallien-Krueger Fusion 550 heads, fed into two 4x10s, one on each side of Rick Allen's kit. In fact, nothing has changed with Savage's rig for a good few tours, the bassist being the first to admit he might go through an entire run without even looking at what he's plugged into. Why bother, when there's so little to go wrong?

"I'm not an anorak," he chuckles. "If it sounds good to my ears, that's what I'll stick to. Two of those GKs is more than enough. I like the spectrum of sound you instantly get with them, regardless of where the EQ is set. Straight out of the box, there's a roundness to it, you feel like the tone is complete. There are no nasal frequencies that mess with the stage sound, it's very smooth because nothing needs to jump out."

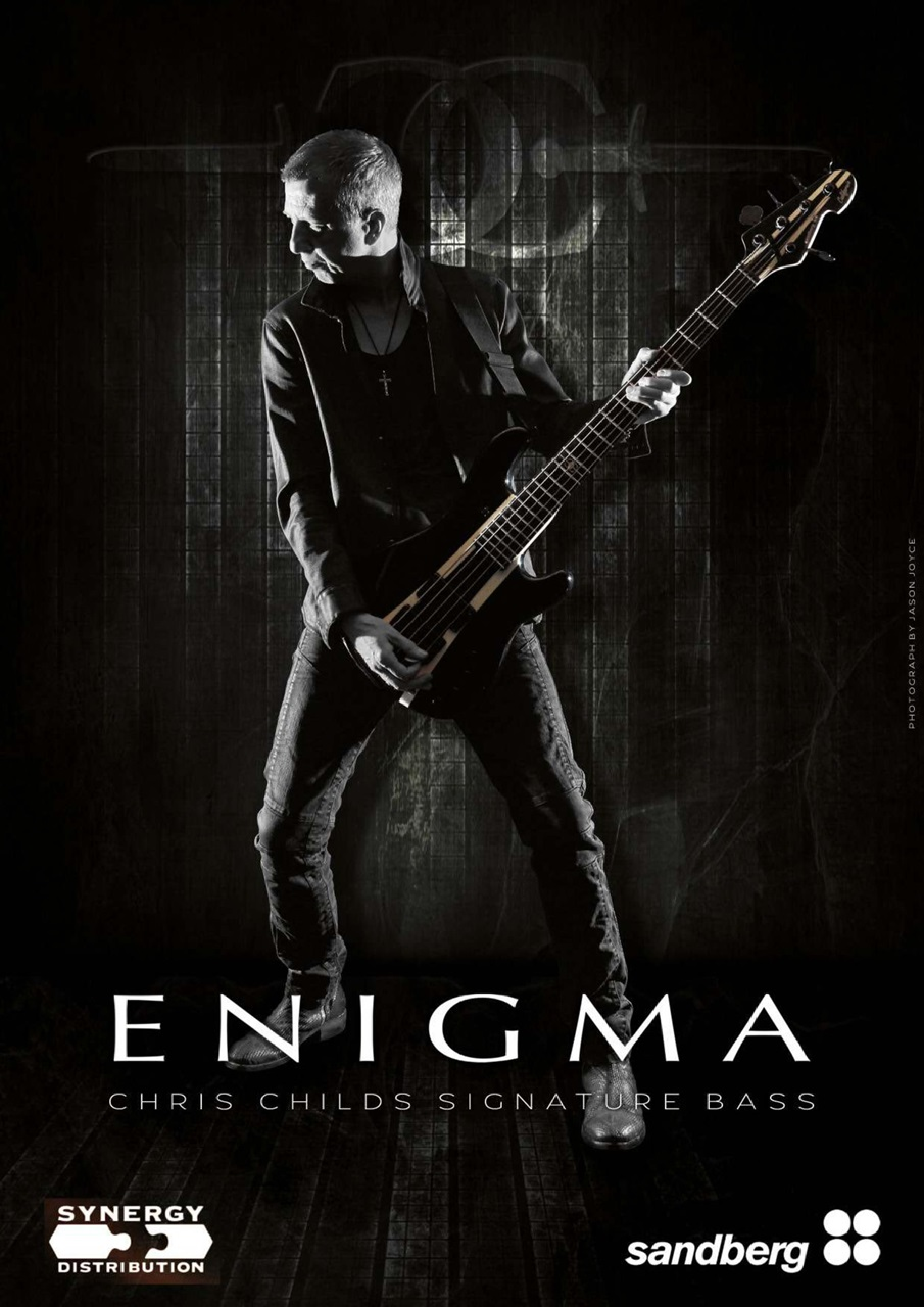
This perhaps explains why the list of people that have seen Savage ditch the pick and use his thumb is very, very short indeed. "I wouldn't use my thumb live – for one, I'm not good enough," he confesses modestly. "I don't have that technique and it would be a sound engineer's worst nightmare just because of the inconsistency of sound. That might change in the studio: like on our [1996] *Slang* album, there's a song called 'Blood Runs Cold' which is all fingers and thumbs. I'll do it to get that dead sound behind the note, but I'd play those songs differently in front of an audience, I'm not going to stand there Jaco Pastorius-style and get it technically right with everyone looking at me. I'd feel inhibited with people studying what I'm playing. It's all horses for courses; you develop your own style, and everyone's opinion of good will differ. People will like you for different reasons. I like Billy Sheehan for different reasons to John Deacon… but they're both bloody great!"

Having made his thoughts clear on musicians overstepping the mark and losing sight of the more collective goal when performing, one can't help but wonder where else Savage sees bass players going wrong. What are the common pitfalls?

"The main area where bass players go wrong is timing," he says, appropriately as today's interview is drawing to an end. "It's absolutely about having an internal clock that's correct in itself, within the boundaries of good taste and good feel, and able to lock in with the drummer. When you're younger, you tend to be grasping the concept of playing a good 'feel' groove, like playing on the back end. You tend to want to rush through to the next section, rather than sit on it. One bit of advice for anyone struggling with that is not to listen to the snare drum. If you concentrate on that, you'll push it and push it, the drums might try to keep up and you'll lose your groove and sexiness. Just listen to the kick. If your psyche is in touch with that, the snare will fall into place. Forget everything else and ingrain that kick pattern in your head – even if you try to go out of time, you'll find it very hard. It's a weird phenomenon!"

Sound advice indeed from someone with four decades of top-level experience behind them. And looking ahead to a very big and busy 2018, the hysteria around Def Leppard looks set to rocket further still.

***Hysteria: 30th Anniversary Edition* is out now on UMC. Info: www.defleppard.com.**


ENIGMA
CHRIS CHILDS SIGNATURE BASS
PHOTOGRAPH BY JASON JOYCE
SYNERGY
DISTRIBUTION
sandberg

GEAR Of The YEAR 2017

Short scales? Amps that fit in your back pocket? Bass guitars from the suspiciously cheap to the scandalously expensive? Ladies and gentlemen, take your seat for our round-up of the best bass gear of 2017… is your favourite bass, amp or effect one of our winners?

Words: Mike Brooks

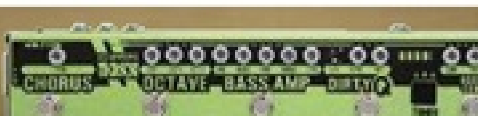
Welcome to *BGM*'s annual look back at the best bass gear of the last 12 months! This year has been a veritable whirlwind for gear, with cheaper basses improving in quality, short-scale basses proving ever more popular and amplification seeing some noticeable changes, with players taking to profiling systems and in-ear monitoring instead of traditional amps and cabs. Recent buying trends continue apace, and fanned-fret instruments continue to be very much in demand, while perennial favourites remain popular despite developments in technology and design.

With so much new gear to cover it can be difficult to keep up with all the new releases as they appear – but we've done our best. Each piece of kit is marked on build quality (can it handle life on the road?), sound quality (does a bass have an impressive choice of sounds and tones? Is an amp able to offer quality sound reinforcement?) and value for money (is the buyer getting plenty of bang for their buck?).

We've divided our categories into Best Fretted Bass, Fretless Bass, Acoustic Bass, Bass Head, Bass Cabinet, Bass Combo and Effects Unit. We have four price ranges for fretted instruments as that category has by far the most candidates for inclusion, so the winner in each price bracket is competing against similarly priced instruments. While we do suggest an overall winner for each category, the items in positions two to five are all highly recommended – so an item listed second isn't necessarily any better than an item in fifth position. Please note: pricing may now differ compared to when we reviewed it.

Our heartfelt thanks to the manufacturers, distributors and stores for going beyond the call of duty when we wanted to review their fab gear, plus the many others involved in the process. Let's do it all again in 2018!

Win



Tell us your nomination for best bass guitar, amp or effect released in the UK in 2017 – and be in with a chance of winning a Valeton Dapper Bass Strip effects unit, worth £160, courtesy of Zoom Corporation. Visit http://bit.ly/2m0xFxZ by January 21 to enter. T&Cs apply.

Best Fretted Bass

Less Than £500

Ibanez GSR206B-WNF £309

www.headstockdistribution.com

Simply amazing value from Ibanez – the quality defies the pricetag and from the moment we reviewed it at the start of the year, all the other basses in this category were playing catch up. Looks, tone and value – a bargain if ever there was one.

Sterling by Music Man Sub Ray 5 £395

www.stringsandthings.co.uk

The Sub series offer all the core features you would expect from a Music Man at a fraction of the price.

ESP LTD F-155 DX Walnut Brown £486

www.selectron-uk.co.uk

Solidly built with great tones and eye-catching looks, and very competitively priced.

Yamaha TRBX305 £340

www.uk.yamaha.com

A budget five-string that punches well above its weight with a pricetag that won't break the bank.

Fender Squier Vintage Modified Jaguar £187

www.fender.com

Short scale basses are hip and this Jaguar fits the bill, especially if you're starting out.

Best Fretted Bass
£500-£1000

Fender Geddy Lee Signature Jazz £901
www.fender.com
Faced with a store full of Jazz basses, this Geddy Lee model blew our socks off. It has everything: quality bass tones, a lively twang and a throaty bark that reminds you why Jazz basses are so popular. This Indonesian model really stood out as a great example.

Hagstrom HB-8 £769
www.rosetti.co.uk
The editor loved this bass, claiming its big sounds were an ideal way to enter eight-string heaven.

Cort A5 Plus £749
www.cortguitars.com
A fine-looking bass that was rated highly as 'a whole lot of bass for the price'. Wise words!

Spector Coda Pro 5 £849
www.bandm.co.uk
The traditional looks of the Coda don't automatically sink in as being 'Spector' but the sounds and quality on offer remind you what you're dealing with.

Fender Roger Waters Precision £786
www.fender.com
A very impressive Precision that sells itself on its playability, regardless of the RW connection.

Best Fretted Bass
£1000-£2500

Marauszczyk Jake L4A £1299
www.bassdirect.co.uk
Outstanding playability, exceptional weight and balance and a selection of tones that will make you smile from ear to ear. And it's pleasing on the eye too! Everything a great bass should be.

Sandberg California II Ida Nielsen Signature £2199
www.synergydistribution.co.uk
A funky bass for the funkiest of bassists; his Royal Purpleness would have approved!

Ernie Ball Music Man Stingray 'Old Smoothie' £2449
www.stringsandthings.co.uk
A reworking of an old (and still very popular!) favourite, harking back to the smoother tone of the original.

Blasius Bali 5 £2455
www.blasiusguitars.com
A storming instrument from the continent with everything going for it, we couldn't put it down!

Spector 1977 Euro LE4 £2450
www.bandm.co.uk
We were particularly taken with this 'time machine' offering from Spector, where it all started.

Best Fretted Bass
More Than £2500

Dingwall D-Bird £2799
www.bassdirect.co.uk
The Gibson Thunderbird given the Sheldon Dingwall treatment – a new instrument is born! Rockers can now enjoy the mojo of that body shape without the headstock heading to the floor in record time. All the playability we associate with a Dingwall and smile-inducing tone. Rock on!

Rikkers Local Wood Treeline Singlecut £3800
www.rikkersguitars.com
A crowd-pleaser from LBGS 2017, a mighty fine instrument that simply works, despite the crazy visuals.

Ernie Ball Music Man Stingray 30th Anniversary 5 £2800
www.stringsandthings.co.uk
A worthy anniversary celebration and an outstanding five-string, still an industry standard.

Elrick Steve Lawson Signature £5500
www.bassdirect.co.uk
BGM tutor and FX guru Lawson's signature model impressed us with its inspiring playability and innovation.

Neubauer Phoenix Contrabass £8000
www.neubauerguitars.com
Sure, that's an eye-watering pricetag for Colombian bassist Snow Owl's signature model – but what a bass!

Best Fretless Bass

ACG Salace E-Type £2600
www.acguitars.co.uk
A striking five-string fretless with a dynamic filter system to make the most of every tonal nuance you could wish for. The quality overall is highly impressive; fretless lovers will no doubt wax lyrical about the 'mwah' factor.

Ibanez SRH-500F-NNF £620
www.headstockdistribution.com
A new model for 2017; that slinky Ibanez neck and its electro-acoustic properties make this a real winner.

Anaconda Crusher CXZ5F Zenith £3500
www.anacondabasses.co.uk
Another Anaconda masterpiece with all the bells and whistles. Expertly crafted and ticks all the boxes.

Fender Jaco Pastorius Signature Jazz £2159
www.fender.com
A fine tribute to the master and although it won't necessarily make you sound like Jaco, there is much to like.

Schoenitz Ellipsis £4270
www.schoenitz-gitarren.de
Fretless and acoustic, but what a tone! Woody goodness all round.

Best Acoustic Bass

BSX Allegro 4 Electric Upright £2499
www.bassdirect.co.uk
The DIY nature of assembling this bass may not be for everyone, but it does make transportation very easy, while the sonic display is everything you could hope for. Earthy upright tones, backed up by a modern pickup system, make for a desirable package.

Ibanez SRH500-DEF £620
www.headstockdistribution.com
A highly playable electro-acoustic bass with comfortable dimensions and a lively tone. Check one out!

Fender T-Bucket 300 EFLMMPL Electro-Acoustic £341
www.fender.com
Fine looks and a fine tone too, the electronics package is the icing on the cake. Swing your pants!

Gillett Contour Electro-Acoustic £2650
www.gillettguitars.co.uk
The design decisions are a talking point – but the tones can't be denied.

Furch Line 62 £1340
www.furch.cz
If traditional looks float your boat, cast your eye over the Line 62; clean, simple and responsive.

Best Amp Head

Aguilar AG700 £1169
www.bandm.co.uk
Aguilar's first amp head in some time has been a big hit, and deservedly so. When your amplifiers are held in such high regard, rather than reinvent the wheel, why not take a previous success and make it better? Which they duly did! Powerful, tonal quality and ease of use all in one package.

Vanderkley Spartan £1700
www.bassdirect.co.uk
The successor to the Aurora and another impressive outing from the Vanderkley stable.

Trace Elliot Elf £299
www.bandm.co.uk
Possibly the most eagerly awaited amp of the year and it doesn't disappoint. To say we like it is an understatement.

Markbass EV01 £759
www.mslprofessional.co.uk
An impressive unit that could take bass modelling into the mainstream. Time will tell!

Ashdown ABM-600-EVOIV £699
www.ashdownmusic.com
Powerful, classic tone. Hard to believe this is Ashdown's 20th anniversary... where did the years go?

Best Cabinet

Darkglass GD410C £1295

www.audiodistributiongroup.com

An eagerly awaited cabinet, along with its 2x10 brother, to complement the Microtubes amp range. Contemporary looks and modern construction will no doubt tick many players' boxes, as well as sounding just as you might expect from the current lords of bass distortion.

Phil Jones Bass PJB Cab47 £429

www.synergydistribution.co.uk

Another winner from Phil Jones, small cones don't have to sound small!

Vanderkley 210LNT Neolite £825

www.bassdirect.co.uk

The latest lightweight speaker from Mark Vanderkley and another surefire winner.

Fender Bassman 610 Neo £1208

www.fender.com

For those who prefer a slightly warmer vintage sound but don't want to break their back to get it, this Neo-equipped Bassman cab might be what you're looking for.

Ampeg PF-112 HLF £450

www.polaraudio.co.uk

A big thumbs up from us thanks to all the Ampeg tonal qualities you might expect.

Best Combo

Markbass CMD Super Combo K1 £1299

www.mslprofessional.co.uk

'Exceptional' according to our man, Mr Sanders! This revised version has a more powerful amp and an additional 5" speaker and the proof is in the sonic performance. Although a tad heavier than expected, this isn't enough to put players off. Another winner from Markbass!

Genzler Magellan 350 Bass Array 10-2 £850

www.bassdirect.co.uk

Another portable solution from Jeff Genzler, offering power, tonal quality and portability in a neat and tidy package.

Peavey MAX115 £375

www.bandm.co.uk

For a one-box solution that won't break the bank, this unit from Peavey continues the heritage of the TNT and TKO combos of years gone by.

Orange OB1-300 £899

www.orangeamps.com

Time to rock on and rock out! This combo from Orange packs plenty of punch.

Ashdown RM-C115T-500 EVO £699

www.ashdownmusic.com

Fully featured combo from those fine chaps at Ashdown, delivering a workable and pleasing package.

Best Effects Unit

Mesa Engineering Subway Bass DI Preamp £220

www.westsidedistribution.com

If you're looking for the Mesa tone but don't want to buy a new amp or full rig, this could be the way to go. Likewise, if you're going cableless and a clean signal with no preamp is too clean for you, this preamp will give you all the warmth you need. As well as being fully featured, its dimensions are gigbag-friendly.

Ashdown NM2 Nate Mendel Signature Double Distortion Pedal £119

www.ashdownmusic.com

The Foos' low-end linchpin offers up this distortion pedal to add crunch to your signal.

EHX Battalion Bass Preamp DI Pedal £136

www.ehx.com

A rather impressive preamp DI unit from EHX at a particularly impressive price – and more features than you could wave a stick at!

Trace Elliot Transit B Preamp £399

www.bandm.co.uk

Eagerly awaited floor-based preamp with plenty of tonal and switching options for the fussiest of players.

Ashdown Funk Face Stuart Zender Twin Dynamic Filter Pedal £299

www.ashdownmusic.com

Ex-Jamiroquai funkateer gives us a downright funkathon with this filter pedal from Ashdown.

HEAD DOWN

Californian metal monsters Machine Head return with a new album, loaded with huge sounds from bassist Jared McEachern. Interview: Joel McIver

© Getty Images

Far from being just another heavy metal band, the American quartet Machine Head occupy a unique niche in the pantheon of metal music. Their music straddles several styles, from groove to thrash and beyond, and the musicianship they bring to the table is astounding, but it's their place on the metal timeline that makes them stand out.

Formed in 1991, the group – currently Robb Flynn (vocals, guitar), Phil Demmel (guitar), Jared McEachern (bass) and Dave McClain (drums) – effectively landed squarely between the end of thrash and the arrival of grunge, but were already up and running by the time nu-metal arrived a few years later. Mostly avoiding that lamentable sound, Machine Head stepped up their game in the 2000s, playing a polished but aggressive form of modern metal that requires maximum precision from McEachern, just as it did from his predecessor Adam Duce.

McEachern, an affable fellow who made his bones with a band called Sanctity before stepping into Duce's place in Machine Head in 2013, appeared on the *Bloodstone & Diamonds* album a year later and now lays down the low end on the new album, *Catharsis*, released this month. His audition for Machine Head is available to view on Youtube; you'll appreciate the chap's phenomenal bass skills when you see it. Talking of which...

There's loads of cool bass on the new album, Jared.

Robb and I talked before the recording and he told me that he wanted to feature the bass a little more on this album, which is cool. I'm really pleased with it. He produced it, with help from our engineer, so it's all done in-house. On certain parts that require those really tight, syncopated bass parts where I lock in with Dave, a couple of times Robb was like 'You can do that again a bit tighter', or on the other hand he might say, 'That sounds cool, now try something else'. I had most of the parts all figured out, but for some of them there was some room to play around and be a little more open, so we took the time to do that.

Did you use an amp in the studio?

There was no amp, I played through an Avalon DI. It's not just a DI, it adds its own compression and grit, which we really liked. I used a Yamaha BB2024 bass in the studio, although I'm actually with ESP for all my other stuff. That Yamaha does this thing that Robb really loves, that kind of mid-range growl that fits really well with the guitars. Adam used that bass live for a while, and so did I, but I play ESP basses live.

Which ESP do you play?

I use the E2 J4 model. It's their Jazz shape, a little bit reworked from the classic Jazz. The model that I have comes with active Seymour Duncans. I travel with three or four of them; a main bass in our normal tuning, a backup and a five-string for anything that's really tuned down. We have a couple of songs that approach low F! I use a 130 gauge B-string for those...

How do you amplify your basses on tour?

I use a blend of a Kemper [amp simulator] and the DI live. In our jam room, though, I have a small head and cab, just so I have something pushing air. I picked up the Mesa Subway 800 head and the little 1x10 cab that comes with it. It's great for the jam room, I just run the Kemper through it.

Does the Kemper deliver a completely accurate tone?

The Kemper does get fantastic tones, but everyone I talk to says it's 95 per cent there – there's just a tiny thing missing – but they're extremely portable, and great for travelling if you have a lot of fly dates. My tone has a little bit of compression and distortion, but I'm looking to add a bit of chorus and fuzz and maybe a wah. One of the new songs has a cool background wah going on, which I'd like to do live – so I'm working on introducing those into my chain. I already have a Boss chorus and I'm looking to get the Dunlop bass wah, which I really like.

How did you get into bass?

I grew up in Virginia and played in the school orchestra when I was in fifth and sixth grade, aged 10 and 11, and when I went to middle school the teacher of that orchestra told me they needed an upright bass player, so I volunteered. I also got my first bass guitar that year, a Fender Mustang, and I got really into it and started up my first band at the age of 12. I moved to a Fender Jazz after that, having borrowed one from school and really liked it. I learned really early on that those basses feel super comfortable to me. I also played an ESP B205 with active EMG soapbars in it; it was just a $500 bass, but it was the first one that I bought with my own money. I played that for quite a while. I had a Dean five-string for a while; in fact it was the bass that I used to audition for Machine Head.

Did you evolve quickly as a bass player?

I had classical training, so I took to it very easily and really enjoyed it. I was writing original songs with my drummer at the age of 13! Just terrible, wannabe rock songs. We were influenced by Alice In Chains and Green Day and the bands of the day. I was actually playing bass more like a guitar. I had a little 10" Traynor practice amp and I would turn up the gain and the distortion

© Getty Images

"I TOLD MYSELF 'F* IT, I'M GONNA GIVE IT A SHOT – AND WHATEVER HAPPENS, AT LEAST I TRIED"**

on it, playing power chords. I knew I loved the bass, but I wasn't particularly informed about what the bass did; I was heavily influenced by Cliff Burton at this point. That raw, crazy, distorted madness that he had – I was definitely trying to emulate a bit of that.

Have you tried out Cliff's signature Morley wah?

Oh, I definitely have one of those. It's designed for Cliff's exact tone; as soon as you press down on it, it's wide open and screaming. It's cool, and I like it, but it's not exactly subtle, because it goes from super closed to way open really fast. The Dunlop's overall sweep is a little more gradual.

Who else influenced you?

A lot of the standard metal guys – Mike Inez, Peter Steele, Steve Harris of course – who you have to be influenced by because they're so prominent. Later it was Victor Wooten too, and later Charlie Mingus as my education continued. I haven't got too deep into slap bass yet, because I was never in a lot of situations where it was required or requested. I've played a lot of rock and a lot of metal, and even when I was in jazz band at school I was playing upright bass. I've been moving in that direction lately though, checking out online videos. It never hurts to gain extra skills, even though I may never ever use it in Machine Head.

You successfully auditioned for Machine Head in 2013. Did you already know them before that?

I knew them a little bit, because my old band Sanctity had opened for them in 2007. At the time, Adam Duce had a broken leg, so they had Brandon Sigmund from Hostility playing bass. Monte Conner [then of Roadrunner Records] suggested to Robb that maybe I could fill in on backup vocals. I was on tour with two bands at the time, basically. So seven or eight years later, my old drummer from Sanctity called me out of the blue and told me that Machine Head were holding auditions for bass players. Our old manager told me he'd check it out and a few days later I got a call from Dave McClain. Dave told me that I should totally go for it and that I needed to focus more on the backing vocals than the bass parts, because he was sure that I could take care of the bass but that the vocals were also going to be really important.

Sounds nerve-wracking – was it?

I told myself 'Fuck it, I'm gonna give it a shot – and whatever happens, at least I tried'. I'm not really a nervous person; I was more excited at getting the chance to do it. I was never sure that I was going to get the job; I just told myself that I was going to go through the process step by step, and enjoy it. I practised for a few weeks and my friend shot my video, which got a positive response and I got the call to fly to California for a live audition. I made sure I knew the songs in and out, had my audition – and here we are!

Catharsis **is out on 18 January on Nuclear Blast.**
Info: www.machinehead1.com

It's amazing that you can get such a powerful, warm, clear and defined sound, with full-range frequency response, out of a very lightweight amp and speaker cabinet.
And the most important thing is:
I hear the real sound of my bass.
It seems that Markbass has not only listened carefully to their amps, but they have also listened to bass players!
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The new ALAIN CARON signature CMD SUPER COMBO K1 has been developed respecting Alain's high standards. This 3-ways combo is amplified by a powerful 1000W MPT (Mark Proprietary Technology) power amp to offer the best fidelity, dynamic and a very serious headroom! Top-quality sound, incredible power, simple and effective controls... all in a highly-portable unit!
14.76"/37,5cm
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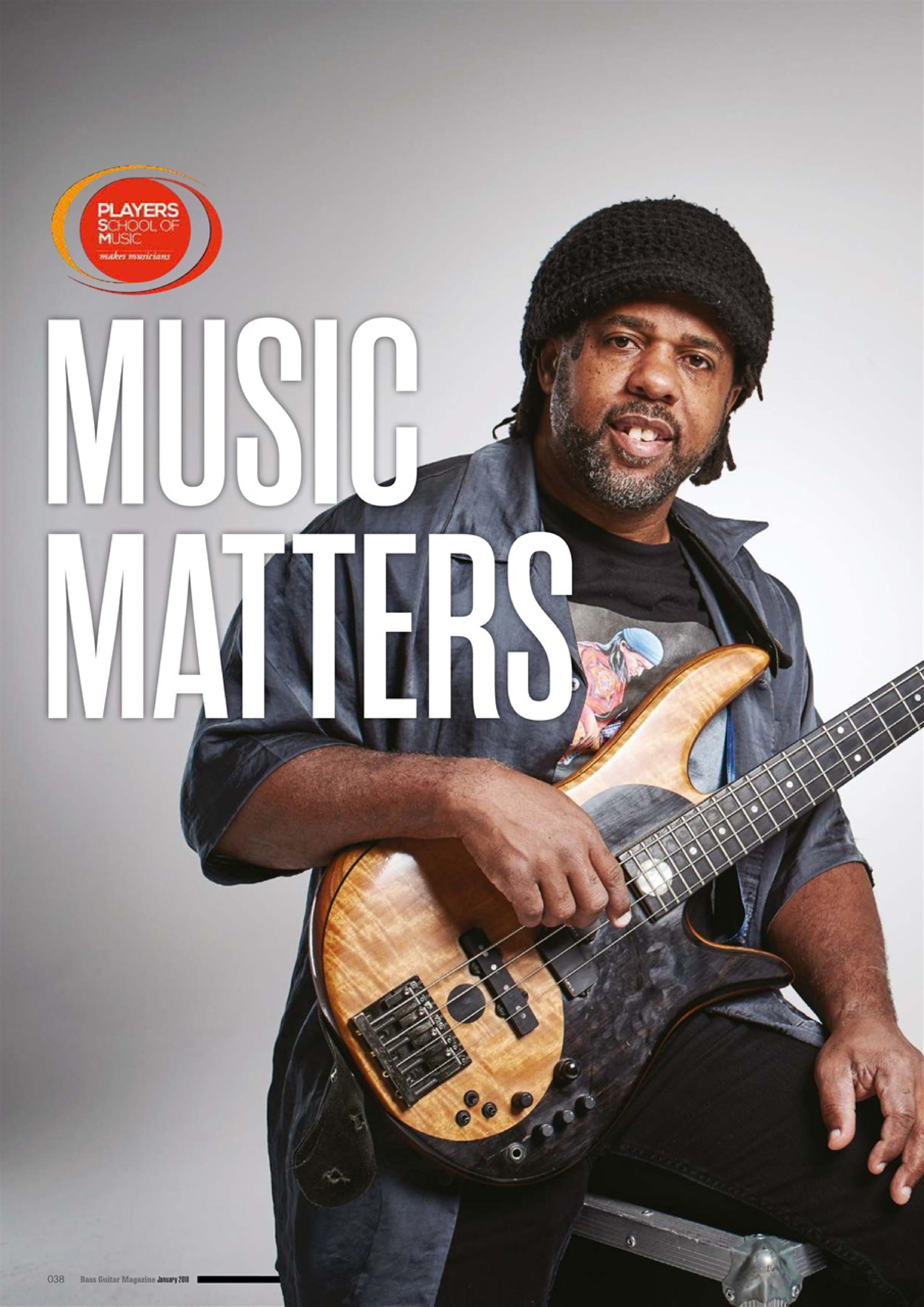

MUSIC MATTERS

A think-piece on music and its importance, written by the great Victor Wooten and provided to *BGM* courtesy of the Players School in Clearwater, Florida. Read and learn!

Studies have shown that kids who learn a musical instrument have fewer behavioural problems in school. Through music, they learn how to take turns, when to talk and when to be quiet, as well as how to co-ordinate what they're doing with what others are doing. Music also helps kids learn how to mix their own voice with others while still maintaining their distinctive identity. Music teaches kids how to listen. And yes – it works just as well for adults.

Playing in a band together with my four older brothers was a huge part of my youth. With our parents' guidance and support, we grew up playing dances, weddings, recreation centres, schools, and nightclubs. We also performed concerts in theatres and stadiums. For me, a typical weekend involved doing homework after school, then, taking a nap so that I could stay awake as we would usually play a nightclub from 10pm until 2am – with one break in the middle. Because we were too young to be in those clubs in the first place, we'd have to spend our 20-minute break in the dressing room or in the car.

Our parents' main concerns were our safety, and who we were as people. They knew that if we were good people, with good heads on our shoulders, the rest would fall into place. In Mom's words, "What does the world need with just another good musician? We have plenty. What the world needs are good people."

Having music on our side was a huge plus. Music was our companion. At a time when most kids were still trying to figure it all out, we already had our feet planted firmly on the ground. At a very young age, we knew who we were and what we were doing with our lives.

I've gotten a lot of credit for playing the bass guitar, but my brothers are the ones who really deserve the credit – especially Regi, my oldest brother. He's only eight years older than me. He's the one who was teaching me to play when I was only two years old. At the same time, Regi was also teaching his five-year-old baby brother Joseph how to play the keyboards. So, that

"IN MOM'S WORDS, 'WHAT DOES THE WORLD NEED WITH ANOTHER GOOD MUSICIAN? WE HAVE PLENTY. THE WORLD NEEDS GOOD PEOPLE.'"

means Regi was only 10 years old when he was teaching us.

When I was only six, we five brothers were touring the west coast of the US as the opening act for the legendary soul artist Curtis Mayfield. When I tell people this, I get a lot of credit, compliments, questions, and stares of disbelief. But, think about it. Who really deserves the credit? How does a 10-year-old boy teach his little brothers, in just a few short years, to play music well enough to be on tour as the opening act for a major artist? That's why we still call Regi 'The Teacher' today. My part was easy. Everyone knows how I learned. But who taught Regi, Roy, and Rudy? There's the real mystery.

I share those stories, not to put focus on my achievements, but to give you an insight into how and why I think about music the way that I do. Let me tell you why I think everyone should play music – and why it's never too late to start.

To me, music is a language. Music is as much a part of me as English. You see, I was actually learning to play music at the same time as I was learning to speak English. And just as important, I was learning them both in the same way. So, when I state that music is a language, I really mean it! Like a spoken language, music can be written and read. It can display feelings and emotions. It can make you laugh, cry, or question, and it can definitely make you move. The best part is that, unlike a verbal language, when I speak music, no one has to understand what I'm saying in order to enjoy it.

Actually, I've never met a musician who didn't agree that music was a language, but it is rare that I ever meet a musician who actually treats it like one. Here's what I mean. Think about this: if you have a little child who shows an interest in music, your first thought is 'Who can I send him/her to for lessons?' That's a totally normal response. Now, here's a similar scenario. Let's say you have a child who shows an interest in speaking English. What do you do? You talk to them. And just as important, you allow them to talk back. You don't treat your child like a beginner saying, 'No, son. You're not good enough to speak to me yet. Go practise a few more years and then we'll talk." No. We don't ever say that.

You know what we do? To use a musical term, we jam with them. That's right! We have verbal jams with our kids. And the best part is this: our kids don't even know that they're beginners. We never tell them they're beginners and we never correct them. For the first five or six years, at least, children are allowed to speak incorrectly. And if they do it repeatedly, like saying "blankey" instead of "blanket", we don't correct them. We start saying it their way.

With music, we start correcting students right away, which often results in them being afraid to play for fear of messing up. Sadly, for most musicians, that fear never goes away.

I believe, like a language, if kids were allowed to jam with professionals, right or wrong, on a daily basis, they would be able to speak freely with their music at an early age just like they do with their voice. Any child who learns in this manner in a musical family does exactly that. That's actually the main ingredient in the story of almost all child prodigies – an older family member who also plays.

There is no downside to learning music. Everything you learn about it makes you a better person. Music is a great example and it provides one with excellent tools for living a balanced life, with tools such as knowing how to listen and when to speak, knowing how to work together and support other people, being on time and dependable, the value of rests and space. Music also teaches us to celebrate our differences. Think about it: a band is better when all the instruments are different. And think about this: when we play a concert, we're not doing it to win or lose. Everyone who comes to see us is on our side. They're cheering for us, unlike in sports, where half of the crowd is always against us.

> "THERE IS NO DOWNSIDE TO LEARNING MUSIC. EVERYTHING YOU LEARN ABOUT IT MAKES YOU A BETTER PERSON"

There are lessons to be learned about all aspects of life such as religion, politics, relationships, race, equality and inequality. The cool thing about music is that it can teach all of these lessons in a safe, unpretentious way. My parents made it clear to us that if we were going to spend a lot of time doing anything, including music, it needed to not only make us better, but also make the world better. All learning institutions should be built upon this standard. If our educational goal is to build well-rounded people who make the world better, it is imperative that we ensure music and the arts are kept in our schools.

Our fore-scholars used the term 'arts and sciences'. That's right; they referred to both art and science. They didn't say 'arts *or* sciences'. They knew what they were saying and what they meant. They knew that science and art should not be separated. Like yin and yang, the two pieces go together to complete the whole. You can't have one without the other. One completes the other. One actually proves the other. India. Asia. Europe. All around the world where academics flourish, the arts also flourish. I challenge you to find a place where academics thrive but arts don't. One doesn't exist without the other.

In the USA, we're cutting arts from schools at an alarming rate. Our country is also failing academically at an alarming rate. Is this a coincidence? Statistics show that participation in the arts actually helps students do better in academia. We need creation, not just computation. No one fails maths because they play too much clarinet.

There's something wonderful that goes on in a musician's brain. Certain parts of our brains light up. Other parts shut off. Scientists are spending a lot of time and money trying to figure us out. Why? Because scientists of the past have always understood the importance of music and art. It was Albert Einstein who stated that most of his greatest discoveries were found through music. When asked about the theory of relativity, Einstein was reported to have said, "It occurred to me by intuition, and music was the driving force behind that intuition. My discovery was the result of musical perception."

The brain of a musician is a powerful brain. To learn more about that topic, check out the book *This Is Your Brain On Music*, written by Daniel Levitin.

As an analogy, science and maths teach lines. Music and art shows us the world between the lines. Both sides are needed to complete the whole picture. As I've heard my brother Joseph say, "We could take the notes from our National Anthem and play them all at once, but you wouldn't recognise the song. Those notes need context. Music teaches us that context." It also teaches us relationship, dynamics, emotion, timing, and space. Notes alone aren't music.

Picture a piano keyboard. If I play the note C and at the same time play the note right next to it, which is a C#, the two notes may sound like they clash. There will be disharmony. But if I play a C# and then play the C up an octave, the ear will hear it differently. The C, becoming the major 7th to the C# will cause the two notes to sound beautiful. Think about it. The same two notes that, at first, seemed to clash will suddenly sound better. There's a life lesson in there.

I want to show the valuable life lessons hidden inside every music lesson. I want you to see how music has the ability to teach more than meets the eye or the ear. When we see something in life that we disagree with, or when we see things that seem to clash, could it be that we are viewing

them in the wrong 'octave?' And maybe, if we change our inner selves or change our 'octave' rather than always blaming and seeking to change the outer situation, then maybe we can begin to find the true beauty that exists in all things? Or, maybe we could try surrounding life's unpleasant situations with other 'notes' to get a clearer picture – a more complete outer and inner picture. Could that be possible? We often forget that we have the ability to change how we see things. Music, like life, is a powerful tool and has the ability to teach us many things. The cool thing about listening to music is that we never lose sight of who's actually doing the listening.

I think everyone should be musical. That doesn't mean that everyone has to learn to play an instrument. I said "be musical". There is a difference, and the difference is in how we think about it. How we think will determine our approach. You see, we speak languages: English, Spanish, French, Mandarin. Yes, we need an instrument to speak these languages, but we wouldn't say, "I speak mouth". We understand the insignificance of the instrument and don't even mention it when we speak of languages. So why, then, are we so quick to say, "I play piano," "I play drums," or "I play bass"? Shouldn't we all just be playing music?

Here's a saying that I like. It goes like this: the best time to plant a tree was 20 years ago. The next best time is *now*. So, the next best time to learn an instrument… you got it. The next best time is now! In any case, be musical. You don't even need an instrument to do that. You're never too old to dance. You're never too old to sing in the shower, and you're never too old to whistle your favorite tune. And the best part is this: when you do either of those, you're never obsessed with having to do it right. That is childlike freedom. I love it! Having to do things right has screwed up too many people.

A mature adult already has the most important ingredient in music, and that is experience – a life story! We've lived our lives fully. We've fallen in and out of love. We've had both successes and failures. We've had our car broken into. Experiences can't be bought or practised by a younger person. Yes, adolescence has its strengths. Younger people will always run faster and be physically stronger, and they should be! But they can't come close to having our experience because they haven't yet lived their full story. We, on the other hand, have a grand story to tell, and it is worth telling. Music is a great way to do it.

For some people, music is the difference between life and death. It not only brings about enjoyment and pleasured listening; it can also be used to heal. Music therapy is a rapidly rising field in our culture. It is being studied in universities and used in hospitals around the world. Music has been used not only to enhance one's memory, but it also helps restore memories. I'm sure we can all recall a time in our lives when a song reminded us of something, but to take it a giant step further, I saw a song bring a man out of a coma. I also witnessed music help a woman dance down the halls, when just moments before, she could barely walk because of Parkinson's disease. Music therapy is powerful and becoming more and more popular, but I believe we are barely scratching the surface of its possibilities. I look forward to the future with excitement.

Be musical, my friends! Thank you all for reading.

Info: www.victorwooten.com, www.playerschool.edu
Contact: Vicky Fulop Berlin, vfberlin@playerschool.edu

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FRANKIE SAYS...

Pictures: Simon Emmett

The Darkness return with an album of anthemic tunes, startling stage garments and a refreshingly candid take on the classic rock template. Bassist Frankie Poullain reveals all to Joel McIver

Look at the Darkness, the renowned rock troupe. They look like they're having a right laugh, with their knowing take on 70s and 80s rock, pictures of Lamborghinis and whatnot, and what's more they *are* having a laugh – in fact, they're having the last one.

The band, originally from Lowestoft and London, were massive in the mid-Noughties, with singer Justin Hawkins camping it up a storm, delivering batlike vocal melodies and sporting catsuits straight from the drawer marked F. Mercury. The other three – guitarist Dan Hawkins, bassist Frankie Poullain and any one of a sequence of drummers – made up a super-tight band, content to let their "mercurial frontman"™ scoop the limelight. The Darkness's songs are what made them special, though, with their best-known hits ('I Believe In A Thing Called Love', 'Growing On Me', 'Get Your Hands Off My Woman' and 'Love Is Only A Feeling') scooping various industry awards and millions of sales.

The inevitable rot set in pretty fast. Poullain left in 2005, for reasons which he explores below, wrote a book and bought a French chateau. By 2006 Justin Hawkins was dealing with a coke addiction and the band split, followed by lacklustre side projects Stone Gods and Hot Leg, and that was that for the Darkness until 2011, when the Hawkins brothers and Poullain reunited; their current drummer is Rufus Taylor, son of Queen drummer Roger. Their third album since the reunion and their fifth overall, *Pinewood Smile*, is a beauty – check out 'Southern Trains', the band's merciless ode to a certain useless train company, if you want an idea of the flavour.

On the press release, Justin declaims: "Why should anybody care? Because if you don't, we're fucked! History will remember us as the apathetic generation who negligently ushered in a dreadful dystopian age that may or may not come to be known as 'The Rise of the Arseclowns'."

You have to laugh. Let's hear Frankie's take on the world of bass...

You were born Francis Patterson but you're known as Frankie Poullain. What gives?
My father came from a working-class family from Hartlepool and won a scholarship to the Guildhall School Of Music as a violinist. He was in the BBC Concert Orchestra and travelled the world. When I was seven he left me, my two brothers and my mum. He basically left us with nothing, so we struggled for a few years. He came back into my life in my 20s, but then he fucked off again. Turns out he's quite a selfish character, so when the Darkness looked like we were going to make it, at the last minute I thought, 'Am I really going to be Francis Patterson? My mum sacrificed everything for us' so I changed my surname to her name. Poullain is French for 'foal'. She was overjoyed, and she loved the band too, because she was a big Stones fan.

The Darkness are still a major touring and recording phenomenon. What's the secret?
The blend of the Hawkins brothers is the key, I guess. You've got your credible and your incredible, as Justin describes it. Shit-hot and white-hot. They're both quite developed in their own particular ways of playing, and a great counterpoint to each other, a juxtaposition of the two guitar styles. Dan can be a force of nature in the studio, he's got perfect timing.

Do those guys play bass too?
Yeah. Justin's quite funky. He's definitely got a little bit of black in him. Not many white people have that natural thing, that Mick Jagger thing. It's that sense of fun, too – he's got his own sense of timing. He's a good bass player, but Dan's a *very* good bass player, which makes it tough for me, obviously! But we all suggest things for each other. We try to create an ego-less environment, so we're constantly egging each other on.

And now you've got Roger Taylor's son on drums.
Rufus has slotted in really well, he's added a lot. He's 25 – half my age. There's a certain symmetry to that.

What basses do you play?
Gibson Thunderbirds from the 1990s. I like those. The one I used on the first album is called the Brown Bastard. A Welsh guy called Ray Williams, who has done a bit of tech-ing for us, came out with this bass for me when the band was unsigned in 2002 and gave it to me at a good price. I just love it.

What's the appeal of Thunderbirds for you?
The Thunderbird is awkward, fragile, and I really relate to it. I feel like it's an extension of my personality. And its neck has been broken four times.

By you?
Yes, through carelessness, but each time it glues back together and seems to be even better. They just don't balance, and there have been many times when you lean it against the wall, and it just topples over. That's what I love about them, they're clumsy. But they have so much personality. I don't like Fender basses, they're a bit too finickity and too correct. I like things which are a bit ugly and a bit awkward.

You get a killer tone out of them.
Thanks, I'm trying to develop that. I've messed around with this and that in the past, but now it's just a HiWatt 200 head. My tech lost the speaker at a festival two years ago and I couldn't find a replacement, but I went to Wild Guitars in Highgate one day and I saw they had this really old Ampeg rig from the 70s. They let me buy the 8x10 speaker. I knew it would sound great with the HiWatt head without even trying it out. The only other thing I sometimes use is an Aguilar Tone Hammer.

How many basses do you tour with?
Three or four, depending on what country I'm going to, because you pay a lot for the carnet. Usually at least two, often three.

Any five-strings?
No, I don't like the way they look and I don't particularly like the sound either. At times I probably should have used one, for the benefit of the track, but I feel that sometimes it's better to have restrictions. I don't like it when you've got too much choice.

How did you get into bass?
I took it up quite late, in my early 20s. I dropped out of university, drank a lot and did a lot of drugs. It was the late 80s in the Bath area and I was into the Young Gods and Sonic Youth. I was also really into a three-piece called World Domination Enterprises, whose bassist had a Sid Vicious vibe about him, with a real low-slung bass – I found out later it was tuned to C# or C. There were elements of dub and punk in that band's music; they were really ahead of the curve. They had a really anarchist, nihilistic vibe that was all about taking control of your destiny and fighting against things that we now accept we're imprisoned by, such as corporations. The bass player was a real inspiration, and what he played was quite rudimentary and made me think about doing it myself. Butthole Surfers and the literature I was reading by people like William Burroughs and Charles Bukowski were influences too. I'd also been through a period in my teenage years when I was into the usual stuff like Adam & The Ants and Tears For Fears and the Police. The ugly side of the 80s didn't affect a lot of the mainstream music that came out in that decade.

What was your first bass?
I think it was a sky-blue Aria Pro II. It's amazing how many people started off on one of those basses. I just messed around on it, I never actually played it on stage. It didn't feel as if it had enough attitude; it was a bit too sensible. I had a black Yamaha after that. The first gig I ever played was at TJs in Newport in 1989, and the first song I ever played was 'Shake Dog Shake' by the Cure. The band was called Papa On A Stick.

How long did it take your bass playing to reach a decent level?

Depends what you call bass playing. I tried to do my own thing. I used to play chords a lot. I liked the pitch of the bass but I didn't want to sound like other bass players, so I experimented a lot with effects and tunings and so on. I liked detuning and playing open chords, and adding phase and all that kind of business. I was into Ennio Morricone soundtracks and ambient music as well. Me and Dan also share a love of My Bloody Valentine.

Interesting. These aren't the bands you'd associate with the sound of the Darkness.
I'd heard all the classic rock bands through my older brother when I was a teenager, and I obviously loved Queen too. I got back into AC/DC when I met Justin.

What was it like when your band got big?
We were incredibly determined and dogged, and we'd had our noses rubbed in the shit quite a lot. There was an early review in the *NME* when we were unsigned that was quite painful, and a personal attack on Justin. There were many things like that. The rejection was a blessing in disguise, though, because we dug in our heels and kept writing.

Why did you leave in 2005?
Several reasons. People became greedy – not bandmembers, just people around us, including the record company, who were trying to cash in as much as they can. We lost the bond that we had with each other, and became divided. There was a lot of partying and cocaine and booze; we were all on different things. That led to a lot of trash-talking and paranoia. It was complicated; a combination of characters and circumstances. No regrets – it happened, and it was probably for the best.

Any cool studio tales?
Before we worked with Roy Thomas Baker, we spent a whole day talking to Mutt Lange, and it was my biggest regret that that didn't happen. I did get to work with Bob Ezrin, though, who made it so relaxed and easy to play in front of him. We recorded 'Christmas Time (Don't Let The Bells End)' single with him at Abbey Road in 2003. That's one of the best-sounding Darkness tracks. We wanted to have a children's choir singing 'bells end' and 'ring peace' in the background, but Bob wouldn't let us, which was funny given that he'd been the guy who recorded his children crying on Lou Reed's *Berlin* album.

Are you still evolving as a bass player?
No idea, but I'm pleased with the live sound I get now. I play closer to the neck now, damping it more than I used to; I have evolved my technique because I like that honky sound.

Do you slap?
Occasionally, basic stuff, but I just don't like the sound.

How do you write songs in the Darkness?
When we've got some riffs and some music that we like, we place a lot of emphasis on vocal melodies. We circle a mic in the middle of a room, almost like animals in the jungle, and we take it in turns to emote. We don't want to overthink too much, because I think that's a problem with a lot of rock music nowadays. We want to capture something which is dumb, euphoric and fresh, which is difficult because the rock vocabulary is stale, isn't it? Perhaps it's finite. That sounds like *I'm* overthinking it now...

Pinewood Smile is out now on Cooking Vinyl. The Darkness will be touring until December 14 and again next year. Info: www.thedarknesslive.com

GEAR REVIEWS

Behold our world-beating bass gear review section, where we bring you the crop of each month's new, interesting or otherwise relevant bass guitars, bass amplifiers, bass speakers and bass effects. Occasionally we'll review a guitar effect if it's particularly useful for bassists, and we'll test recording equipment and general accessories every now and then as well, but generally speaking, this zone is for bass-specific gear.

We take the ratings that we give each item very seriously. *BGM* is the only print magazine devoted to bass in this country, and we have readers from all over the world, so we're responsible about our conclusions. If a product is worth your investigation, we'll say so; if it's flawed in some way, we won't hold back from making that clear. We're not beholden to advertisers in any way and our conclusions are entirely independent of the views of manufacturers, musicians and distributors.

When you read about a bass-related product here, you know you're getting a sensible, balanced review from an experienced bass tester. Value for money is at the top of our agenda in these cash-strapped times, but on the other hand, we believe in paying for quality.

Right, that's enough from me. Remember, this is just about the only place that it's good to have GAS!*

Joel McIver, editor

*GAS = Gear Acquisition Syndrome (a malaise often suffered by bass players)

IBANEZ 2017 SR405 EQM-SLG and SR305E AFM

FENDER Roger Waters Signature Precision

SPECTOR Euro 4 1977 Limited Edition

BLASIUS Bali

PHIL JONES PJB D400 Head and Cab-47 Cabinet

IBANEZ

2017 SR405 EQM-SLG and SR305E AFM

When it comes to affordability, Ibanez continue to impress. These 2017 models combine looks and features with pricetags that won't blow your mind, says Mike Brooks

Professional Music Technology
www.pmtonline.co.uk

Headstock Distribution
www.headstockdistribution.com

£439 and £315

It can be difficult to keep up with the current Ibanez catalogue, such is the rapidity with which they bring new models and finishes to market. Chances are if you find a model and colour combination that you like, if you hang about, it may well have been superseded before you splash the cash. Nevertheless, Ibanez have been very active this year in bringing new models to market, and in our quest to bring you the lowdown on all that's good in the budget market, we sought out this pair of delectable five-strings, resplendent in new 2017 finishes. With £125 difference in price, we were keen to see if there was a noticeable difference in terms of quality and playability. Read on!

Build Quality

Both basses follow a standard format and adhere totally to the ever-popular Soundgear design ethos, with slippery slimline maple and rosewood bolt-on necks, sleek mahogany bodies matched with quality hardware, Ibanez's own humbucking pickups and an active three-band EQ. The more expensive SR405 model comes with a different bridge and a pleasing quilted maple top but otherwise, the features list is the same for both models.

The extended body horns contribute to the impressive balance while the deep lower cutaways provide unhindered access to the upper regions of the 24-fret rosewood fingerboards. Although there isn't the standard front and back contouring, Ibanez have long since refined the overall contouring design of their bass bodies – so be in no doubt that both basses are comfortable to wear.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Ibanez 2017 SR305E AFM
Price | £315
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Autumn fade metallic gloss
Body | Mahogany with quilted maple top
Neck | Five-piece laminate – maple and rosewood, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 45mm
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 24
Pickups | 2 x Ibanez Power Span dual-coil humbucking pickups
Electronics | Active, 9-volt 3-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, bass, middle, treble, Power Tap switch (tap/series/power tap)
Hardware | Cosmo black hardware, die cast machine heads, Accu-cast B305 bridge
Weight | 3.6 kg
Case/gig bag included | No
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A fine bass for the money with a good low-end display
Minus | A few minor shortcomings
Overall | For those on a restricted budget, the SR305E ticks many boxes

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

"THESE ARE BOTH IMPRESSIVE BASSES AND OFFER GREAT VALUE FOR MONEY"

White dot position markers feature on the front and side of both necks, and both neck pockets are tight, with the necks well-seated and securely attached. After five minutes with both instruments, differences in the level of finishing become apparent, such as the SR305E having a rougher neck finish around the nut heel and the setup on the SR405 being noticeably more playable. The latter does have one or two sharp fret ends and the G string is a little high for my taste, but that is easily rectified.

Cosmo black hardware has been used throughout, with all of the machine heads and controls attached securely; the bridge on both models looks identical, although their specification suggests otherwise. The side mounted jack socket is a cool touch, and especially useful if you pass your lead through your strap for safety.

Sounds And Playability

With 16.5mm string spacing at the bridge, good overall balance, 45mm nut width and slinky neck profiles, these really are basses built for comfort. Don't be surprised if you keep returning to either bass for 'one more go'. Some players may find the string spacing a little cramped, especially with the extended range offered by the B string, but with some persistence you will be rewarded with a fine playing experience.

So with the same electronics and hardware, is there any difference in the natural sound of the timbers unplugged? First impressions suggest not, although there is a noticeable warmth and sustain to the SR405 that becomes apparent over time. Plugged in, we get a clearer idea of what's on offer. With the EQ set flat on both models, the SR305E has a lighter tone with a little less focus, and the sustain of the SR405 that has already been mentioned becomes even more noticeable. Having said that, the cheaper model does possess a lively snap and 'bounce', but it isn't the same tonal region as the more expensive SR405.

The three-band EQ gives both basses a fine assortment of available tones, but be aware that there is plenty of power on tap – so take some time to get used to the extremes available. Too much bass EQ can be overpowering, and I found that pushing that side of things had a negative effect on the low B string's performance; a little boost to the midrange made those notes stand out nicely. Likewise, the treble response on both basses is razor-sharp, so get to know how the EQ responds to your playing.

The Power Tap switch gives both basses further sonic possibilities. The tap option gives a brighter single-coil-like tone, and series provides a fuller, more powerful display, while power tap is a mix of the two. It really depends on what sort of tone you're after at any given time, but needless to say, there is plenty of scope with both instruments.

Conclusion

These are both impressive basses and offer great value for money. Of the two, the more expensive SR405 is the better bass overall, feeling a little more complete and finished to a slightly higher level. Both basses have some great sounds on offer and handle exceptionally well, so if you're looking for a new five-string or a suitable backup to your regular bass, I can heartily recommend either instrument…

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Ibanez 2017 SR405 EQM-SLG
Price | £439
Made In | Indonesia
Colour | Surreal blue burst coast gloss
Body | Mahogany with quilted maple top
Neck | Five-piece laminate – maple and rosewood, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt-on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 45mm
Fingerboard | Rosewood
Frets | 24
Pickups | 2 x Ibanez Power Span dual-coil humbucking pickups
Electronics | Active, 9-volt three-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, bass, middle, treble, Power Tap switch (tap/series/power tap)
Hardware | Cosmo black hardware, die-cast machine heads, Accu-cast B125 bridge
Weight: 3.6 kg
Case/gig bag included | No
Left-hand option available | Yes

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A great sounding five-string that will suit players of all styles
Minus | A few finishing niggles
Overall | This bass puts more expensive basses to shame

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

chowny
Quality Design Tone!
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FENDER

Roger Waters Signature Precision

Will Roger Waters' signature Fender send you to the *Dark Side Of The Moon*, or drive you up the *Wall?* Mike Brooks finds out if this modern take on a classic model is worth the Money...

Guitar Guitar
www.guitarguitar.co.uk

£786

Sometime Pink Floyd bassist Roger Waters commands a huge fanbase with sold-out shows wherever he plays, and if this instrument is anything to go by, he certainly knows a good bass tone when he hears it. Sure, you may look at this Fender and think 'Not another Precision?' – but never assume that you know exactly how a bass will play and sound until you've tried it. So what does this bass bring to the table?

Build Quality

The finish of Waters' bass harks back to the classic *Wall* period of the late 70s and early 80s, and is not out of keeping with that time, when sunburst Fenders were being outnumbered by black, white and solid-coloured gloss instruments. These fitted in more favourably with the punk and new wave artists that were most prominent at the time, so we have the classic black gloss

body matched with a warm-hued maple neck and fingerboard, also finished with a urethane gloss coat, and a single-ply black scratchplate to complete the minimal but classic vibe.

With the usual front and rear contouring, the bass feels very familiar and is very comfortable to wear. Despite some headstock bias, the bass balances perfectly well when placed on a strap: this certainly isn't a Fender back-breaker from yesteryear. Build quality generally is very good: the full D-shaped neck profile is a classic touch and gives the player something to get stuck into, while the F-stamped neck plate, signature on the rear of the headstock and brass nut for improved sustain all point to care and attention being afforded to this model.

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

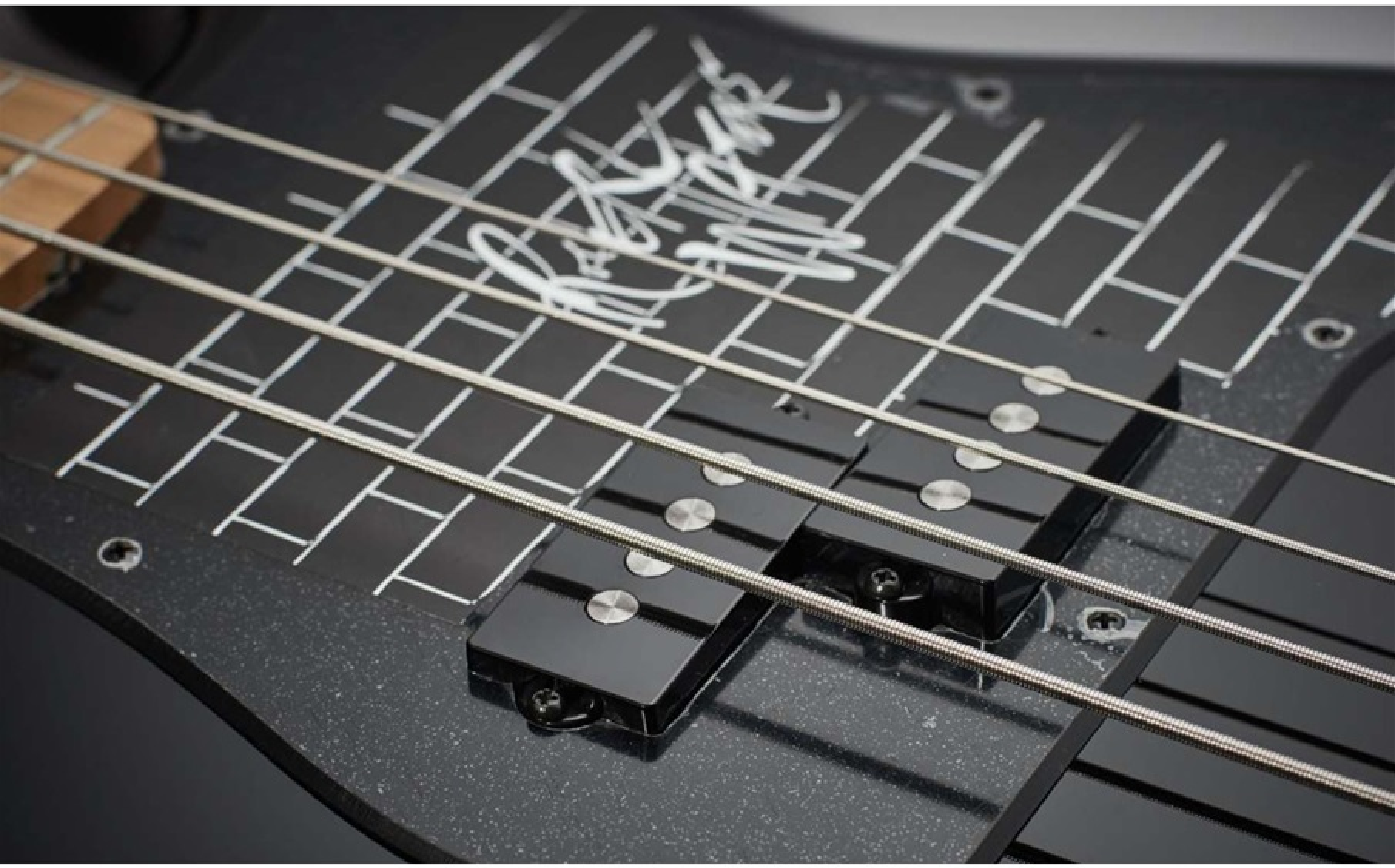
Price | £786
Made In | Mexico
Colour | Black
Body | Alder
Neck | Maple, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Bolt on, four-bolt attachment
Nut Width | 44mm
Fingerboard | Maple
Frets | 20
Pickups | 1 x Seymour Duncan Basslines SPB-3 Quarter Pounder split-coil
Electronics | Passive
Controls | Volume, tone
Hardware | Chrome and black hardware, Fender elephant ear machine heads, standard bridge
Weight | 3.9 kg
Case/gig bag included | Deluxe gigbag
Left-hand option available | No

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A great playing, and sounding, Precision; ticks all the boxes sonically
Minus | Tonal limitations are apparent
Overall | A fine signature model that will appeal to Floyd fans and general bass players alike

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE



“FOR THOSE WHO THINK A P-BASS IS TOO LIMITING, I DEFY YOU TO TRY A ROGER WATERS SIGNATURE MODEL AND SEE IF IT DOESN’T CHANGE YOUR OPINION”

Black dots have been utilised on the front and side of the neck, while the neck pocket appears solid and tightly seated. The chrome 70s-style machine heads and black knurled volume and tone controls are all reassuringly attached and operate smoothly.

Sounds And Playability

The bass is set up very well, which makes its somewhat bulky dimensions feel a lot more comfortable; I was expecting a sub-£1000 Mexican Precision to be a little more hard work than this bass actually is, which is a pleasant surprise. Considering that this isn’t a Custom Shop instrument, I was also surprised at just how resonant this bass is before plugging it in. Despite its naturally deep sound, a pronounced midrange was also present, giving the bass a pleasing bright response.

Once plugged in, this Precision’s true colours came to the fore and for lovers of the classic P-Bass punch, throaty midrange and spiky clarity, you will very much appreciate what it has to offer. Pick players in particular will enjoy the attack from the Seymour Duncan Quarter Pounder pickup. However, if you prefer a woodier-sounding Precision, roll some of the tone control back slightly and the familiar rounded tones are easily accessible. As a fingerstyle player, if you require a little more edge or bite for definition, this bass certainly isn’t lacking in that respect and will respond accordingly.

What quickly comes across is that although this is a new bass, with modern manufacturing advances bestowed upon it, Fender have pretty much nailed the classic (there’s that word again!) Precision tone – but in a package that includes tone and volume controls that function across the pots’ whole turn. Added to that is a neck that is well-crafted, with no dead spots that I could find, no sharp fret edges and a fairly even string volume across all four strings.

Players of all persuasions will find something to enjoy in this bass; you begin to wonder why every Precision (whether made by Fender or not) can’t play as well as this. At £786, it’s hardly remortgaging material, yet we have come across instruments in this vein, costing a lot more, that haven’t played half as well.

Conclusion

This is a very clearly voiced instrument that isn’t hard work to play, unlike some Precisions. Fender have really come up with the goods with this bass, and although it may not have the visuals or bells and whistles of a lot of instruments, a good bass is a good bass whichever way you look at it. For those who hold the opinion that a P-Bass is too limiting, I defy you to track down a Roger Waters Signature model and see if it doesn’t change your opinion. At £786, you can’t really go too wrong; I’m happy to recommend this bass to anyone looking for a pleasing, and welcoming, Precision without having to enter vintage bass territory.

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www.edenamps.com/microtour.html

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

RRP | £2450
Made In | Czech Republic
Body | American walnut
Neck | Three-piece maple
Neck Join | Neck-through
Fingerboard | Rosewood, 24 frets
Pickups | DiMarzio Model P
Electronics | Spector Tone Pump active tone circuit
Hardware | Lightweight zinc brass alloy Spector bridge, Gotoh tuners

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Tones, neck feel, incredible design and performance
Minus | None
Overall | A flawless reissue of a pioneering design... but life isn't about looking back

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

SPECTOR
Euro 4 1977 Limited Edition

Looking backward is the new looking forward, judging by this beautiful but costly reissue of a classic instrument. Joel McIver weighs up the pros and cons of going retro

Barnes & Mullins
www.bandm.co.uk

£2450

In the musical instrument business, as with the music and film industries, creativity has been replaced – to an extent – by a tendency to look backwards for quality. We won't buy a £6.99 CD by a new band, but we'll pay £100 for a classic album reissued as a box set. We won't go and see a new film in the cinema, but we'll queue up to see a remake of an old movie. What's the TV show of the moment? *Stranger Things*, a loving homage to the 1980s. And when it comes to bass guitars, we're happy to wallow in nostalgia, hence the popularity of classic road-worn or aged gear. On a related note, here's a beautiful replica of a 1977 Spector, released four decades after the release of the original NS-1 model and available at a wallet-crushing price in strictly limited quantities. So how does this new old bass play?

Build Quality

You may be familiar with the story of the original NS-1, the bass named after its designer Ned Steinberger (yes, *that* Steinberger), who came

up with the idea of a curved-body bass to allow for maximum player comfort. Spector launched the bass in 1977, following up in '79 with a two-pickup model called the NS-2, and 40 years later the company has a ton of amazing instruments on the market, over 700 endorsing bassists and an assured place in history. This bass, a Euro four-string manufactured in the Czech Republic, is your chance to own what is effectively a slightly beefed-up NS-1, assuming that approximately two and a half grand of your taxed income is lying around and doesn't need to be spent on your mortgage/car/children/beer.

Pick it up and you'll be instantly in love with the thing, assuming four strings, a through neck and a single pickup add up to form your preferred configuration. It's flawless. The rear of the body is insanely comfortable, whether your midriff resembles a six-pack or a party keg, and the neck hits the point between slippery and solid that you dream about if you're as much of a nerd about this stuff as we are. Through necks aren't for everyone, granted, but you have to love the seamless

no-join between neck and body, making the instrument feel essentially like a single chunk of wood with a fingerboard and chunky brass nut glued to it.

The DiMarzio Model P pickup is the same as the one Steinberger used back in '77, but the firm have added an active Tone Pump tone circuit for extra boost at top and bottom. The only other major difference between this bass and the now-fairly-ancient original is the new bridge, a lightweight zinc brass alloy job that feels totally muscular. So far, so very, very good indeed.

Sounds And Playability

I've always loved the wacky angles of the control pots on Spectors because they're almost deliberately designed to be fun rather than serious. Spin the dead simple volume, bass and treble pots as you wish, you won't get into trouble; the instrument's natural, flat tone is the pure, middy sound that Spectors have always delivered, modulated here by plenty of thump and crackle at either end.

The sustain is highly respectable, of course, and if you roll on the bottom frequencies without losing the treble completely you'll land on a huge, bell-like sound of great resonance. It's like having your cheek stroked. Conversely, push the upper mids and lose the bass and you'll find a jagged, clattery sound that is like having your forehead punched.

The neck is super-playable, almost asking you to execute legato runs and give your picking hand a rest. The surface of the back of the neck is the instrument's real strength, permitting effortless movement while you dig in – which, given the lack of a neck ramp, you can really do. Slappers will love the fact that you can get right under the strings, while tapping is made easier than usual for the non-Billy Sheehans among us with a sympathetic string spacing and action, plus a fingerboard that bounces strings right back at you, it seems.

Conclusion

What a fantastic bass, as it damn well should be at this price point. I couldn't find a thing wrong with it. My only slight whine is that for your £2500, you could look forward into the evolution of bass technology and invest in an innovative instrument, rather than choosing to look backwards to an old, if also wonderful, one. Too much relentless nostalgia isn't a good thing, I feel, if this industry is to progress. Then again, the instrument under review is one of the finest I've played in years, so what do I know? Only you can decide if going back or forward will suit you best. I just work here…

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BLASIUS
Bali

You would expect a bass model entitled the Bali to be exotic, and Hungarian luthiers Blasius haven't disappointed. Mike Brooks pours a posh cocktail

Blasius Guitars
www.blasiusguitars.com

£2455

We love uncovering great instruments from new luthiers; you often find something of a hidden gem. Travelling to *BGM*'s doormat all the way from Hungary, this Bali five-string from Blasius Guitars is a fine bass that ticks most of the boxes on first inspection. Although at first glance you may think it's just another smart-looking bass with Bartolini pickups, what you can't see under the pleasant bodywork are the electronics. And until you plug it in, who knows what's in store? Allow me to fill you in.

Build Quality

To the untrained eye, the Bali looks quite standard in its appearance. Extensive cutaways offer unhindered access to the upper regions of the 22-fret ovangkol fingerboard, while front and rear contouring make the bass sit perfectly against the player's body. The four-piece

"I WAS HIGHLY IMPRESSED BY THE BALI FROM THE MOMENT I TOOK IT FROM THE SUPPLIED MONO GIGBAG"

laminated body, coupled with a seven-piece laminated through-neck (with carbon graphite reinforcement rods), means that the timbers will inevitably contribute to the tones available as well as offering some eye candy. The spalted figured maple top is coloured with a blue/green/aqua dye, which has also been used on the neck, and both are coated in a satin acrylic finish. The impressive colour scheme has also been applied to the matching headstock, while the

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Price | £2455
Made In | Hungary
Colour | Blue/green/aqua/brown
Body | Four-piece laminate – mahogany core, flame maple rear, walnut, figured spalted maple top
Neck | Seven-piece laminate – ash/walnut/maple/ipe lapacho/maple/walnut/ash, 34" scale
Neck Joint | Through-neck
Nut Width | 45mm
Fingerboard | Ovangkol
Frets | 22
Pickups | 2 x Bartolini 74X45J pickups
Electronics | Active, Zolkow X3 3-band EQ
Controls | Volume, pickup pan, bass, middle, treble
Hardware | Chrome, Schaller M4 machine heads, Schaller Bassbridge 2000-5
Weight | 3.9kg
Case/gig bag included | Mono Vertigo gigbag
Left-hand option available | Custom order

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | A great all-round package with everything you could want from a great five-string
Minus | Pricey but worthwhile
Overall | A fabulous bass and a real surprise from the Blasius stable

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

lack of front-facing position markers maintains a clean look to this bass, although side markers are present along the top edge. Chrome hardware has been used throughout with Schaller M4 machine heads and a 2000-5 bridge unit, while knurled chrome controls for volume, pickup pan, bass, middle and treble are all securely attached and operate smoothly.

A pair of Bartolini 74X45J pickups have been matched with a Zolkow X3 preamp; removing the control cavity plate shows that the circuit has trimpots for the output of each pickup, with a boost of 10dB available. Dip switches within the preamp also allow the frequencies for each control to be selected as per the player's requirements, with a boost or cut of 12dB at 40, 80, 220, 400, 600 and 900Hz and 1.8 kHz, and boost or cut of 14dB at 4, 5, 10 and 20 kHz. The control cavity itself is very well shielded with copper, but it is rather busy, with a lot of cabling and a loose floating battery. That said, the general level of finishing is exemplary.

Sounds And Playability

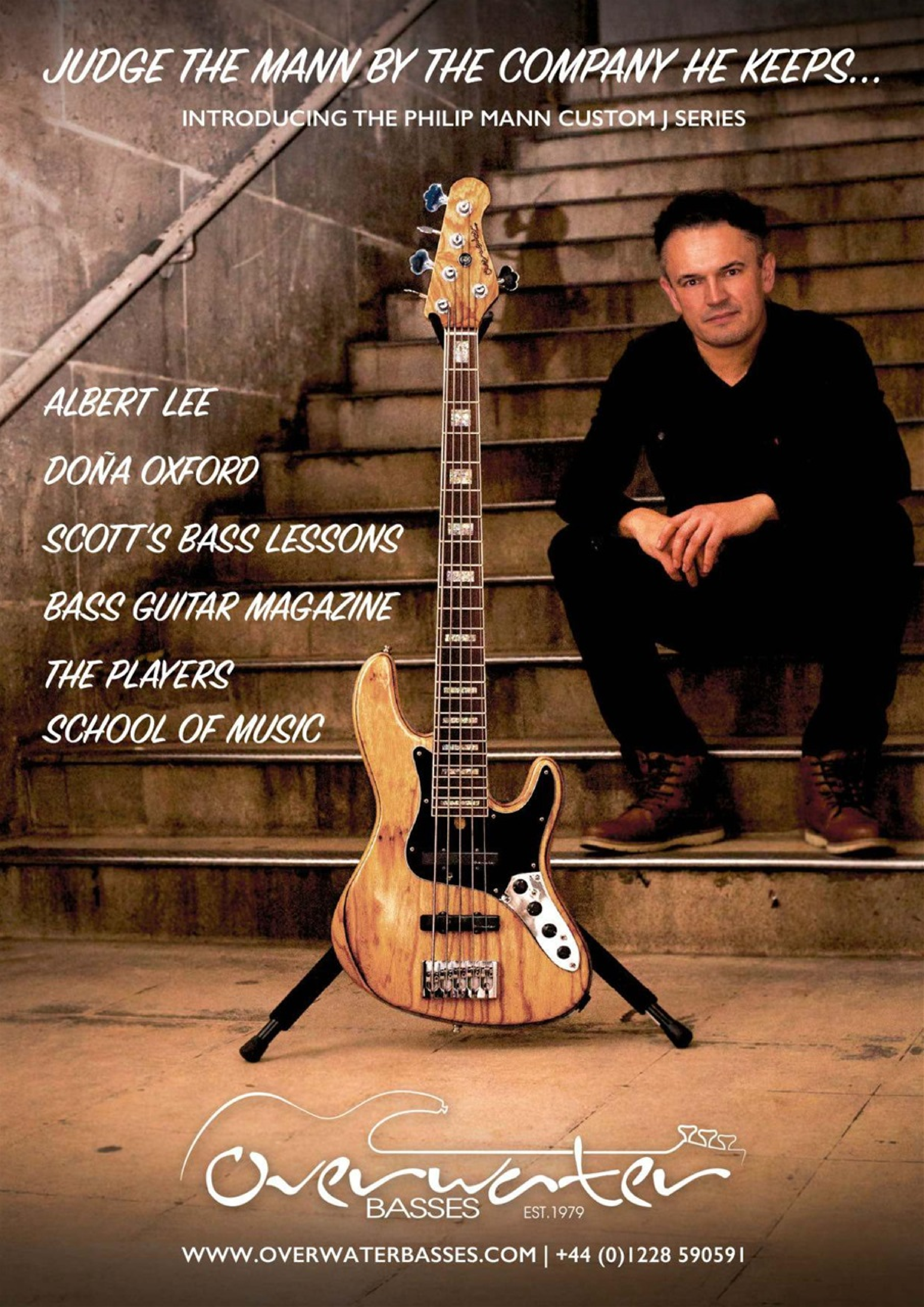
Despite some headstock bias, the bass balances well and isn't particularly over-burdened by the multiple timbers used in its construction. Thankfully, the slim D-shaped neck profile makes for a very enjoyable playing experience; the thin neck and slim nut width lend themselves very nicely to an extremely comfortable five-string bass, while the consistent fingerboard width across the whole neck makes this an easy instrument to navigate. The setup is immaculate, with no sharp fret ends anywhere along the neck and a silky-smooth string action.

From the off, this is a vibrant, organic-sounding instrument; when playing the bass, you can actually feel the resonance of the body along with a strong sustain that projects the notes you play. Plug in and the woody nature of the Bali stands out a mile; despite a great electronics package, the natural sound is highly impressive in its own right. With the EQ set flat, the best description I can offer is that tonally, the Bali breathes very nicely, with a modern jazz tone as a starting point. How you then choose to tailor the sounds on offer is very much up to you.

With a touch of mid boost, the low B string sounds focused and growly, presenting a strong tone that is in no way woolly, instead being articulate and defined. All along the fingerboard, the note delivery is crisp but with plenty of body to the notes, and an even response from every string. Obviously, changing things up using the internal options of the preamp opens the tonal scope even wider; you can compensate for your playing style and output if you prefer to use one pickup more regularly than another. Should you wish to tailor the EQ's effectiveness in a given frequency range, experimenting with the dip switches will give you increased flexibility.

Conclusion

I was highly impressed by the Bali from the moment I took it from the supplied Mono gigbag. Everything about it is simple and effective with a minimum of fuss; even the extensive tonal options are easily accessible and modifications can be made with ease. If you don't like a change that you've made, just return it to its last setting – simple. Effortless playability and a broad tonal palette come at a cost, of course, and this bass isn't cheap at just under £2500. I can easily see where the cost is going, however, and anyone wishing to take the plunge may just find they've bought the bass of their dreams.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PHIL JONES

PJB D400 Head and Cab-47 Cabinet

Kev Sanders checks out a powerful but super-compact rig from expat Brit, hi-fi boffin and non-conformist Phil Jones

Synergy Distribution
www.synergydistribution.co.uk

£599 and £429

Phil Jones' tiny Briefcase and Suitcase combos have for many years been appreciated by jazz double bassists, and are also a firm favourite among city-dwelling electric players who need something which they can sling over one shoulder as they catch a tube to their next gig. Phil practically invented the compact audiophile bass combo, but his separate amps and cabs – while always sounding astonishingly good – were not always, shall we say, quite so compact. The mighty M500 and M300 amps and Piranha-loaded multiple speaker cabinets are good, very good in fact, but big, weighty and expensive. Helping to fill the gap in the catalogue between these two extremes is a range of D-series amps, and the new Cab-47.

The D400 amp redefines what 'compact' means. It's tiny; in fact, our first impressions are that you don't really get very much for your 600 quid. But take a closer look and you'll see that despite its diminutive size, it's beautifully designed and put together with black anodised aircraft-grade aluminium used for the chassis and case and heavy, satin milled aluminium controls. The 1U height of the D400 means that it can be rack mounted (there's a kit available) but I really don't see the point. The padded gig bag it comes with should be more than adequate and keep it in good nick for years.

In use it's mostly very straightforward. Plug in and set the micro-toggle switch according to whether you're using an active or passive bass; there's also a mute function on the same switch. Adjust your level, then set the five-band EQ. This consists of Lo Bass, Hi Bass, Lo Mid, Hi Mid and Treble. These are well spaced for bass and have a massive plus or minus 18dB of boost and cut, so there's tons of scope for a great sound from virtually anything you plug in. The limiter,

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~ Jim Warren
FOH: Radiohead, Arcade Fire, Nine Inch Nails, Peter Gabriel

jensen transformers INSIDE

WHAT WE THINK

Phil Jones PJB D400 Head
Price | £599 including PJB padded case
Made in | China
Power | 350 watts at 4 ohms, 200 watts at 8 ohms
Features | Switchable Hi and Lo impedance input, Gain, Clip indicator and five-band EQ, Limiter with level control and indicator, Master Volume, Tuner Out, Effects Send/Return, Power on/off with status light, XLR DI with ground lift, 1 x Speakon out, Preamp out
Size | W 244mm x D 193mm x H 43
Weight | 1.3 kg

TECHNICAL SPECIFICATION

Phil Jones PJB Cab-47
Price | £429 including PJB cover
Power | 300 watts at 8 ohms
Speakers | 4 x 7" baffle mounted drivers, 2" tweeter
Inputs | 2 x Speakon inputs, 4 x rear port
Size | W 414mm x D 320mm x H 431mm
Weight | 17.5 kg

WHAT WE THINK

Plus | Neutral sounding, well made and powerful enough for most gigging situations
Minus | No Aux in, and I'd prefer a traditional standby switch
Overall | A compact but powerful rig, designed and made using top quality components

BGM RATING

BUILD QUALITY
SOUND QUALITY
VALUE

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~ Bob Rice
Engineer/Programmer: Neil Young, Roger Waters, Chick Corea, Ben Harper

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with its separate on/off toggle and status light, is controlled by just one knob. If you've not used one before, be warned that it's counter-intuitive (turned fully clockwise is 'off') but it works brilliantly and I guarantee you'll use it. Lastly, there's a large volume control on the far right. The back panel features everything you'd expect from a pro-quality amp: XLR DI out which can be switched to pre or post EQ, an FX loop, jack preamp out, headphone input and a Speakon output.

Rather than having a separate standby switch, the D400 automatically goes into standby mode when first switched on or left unused for a few minutes. In order to switch the amp from standby to on, you simply start playing; the LED will change from red to green and the amp will automatically wake up. If you've ever driven a car that switches itself off at traffic lights you'll know how unnerving this can be until you get used to it. It works fine, but if you're using a low-output passive bass or playing an acoustic instrument with a piezo pickup, you'll need to turn up the instrument's volume and play quite hard to get the amp to switch on – and when you do, you need to immediately dampen the strings or turn the volume down, or the sound will be amplified.

I'm told that this is to conform with forthcoming Euro legislation, so I guess it's something we're all going to have to get used to – although throughout the couple of weeks I was using the D400, it did catch me out a few times. However, once you're used to the way it works it's fine, and I soon fell into the habit of leaving the input selector on mute before I started playing. Personally I'd still prefer a traditional separate standby switch, though.

Moving on to the Cab-47, this marks a bit of a departure from the PJB norm, with no heavily chromed corner protectors and shiny, grained black tolex. Instead there's a business-like matt black finish to the sides and a tough black nylon felt covering top, bottom and back. Something it does share with other PJB cabs, however, is the thick steel grille and large top-mounted grab handle, both of which are welcome features.

For such a compact cab it's surprisingly solid, and there's a feeling of robust quality about the unit. This quality is more than just cosmetic, too. It's worth remembering that PJB is the only manufacturer of bass gear which produces their own speakers – and as well as bass drivers, the company designs and manufactures some of the highest-performing audio hi-fi drivers available. The cab houses four 7" speakers, which are front-mounted with a 2"

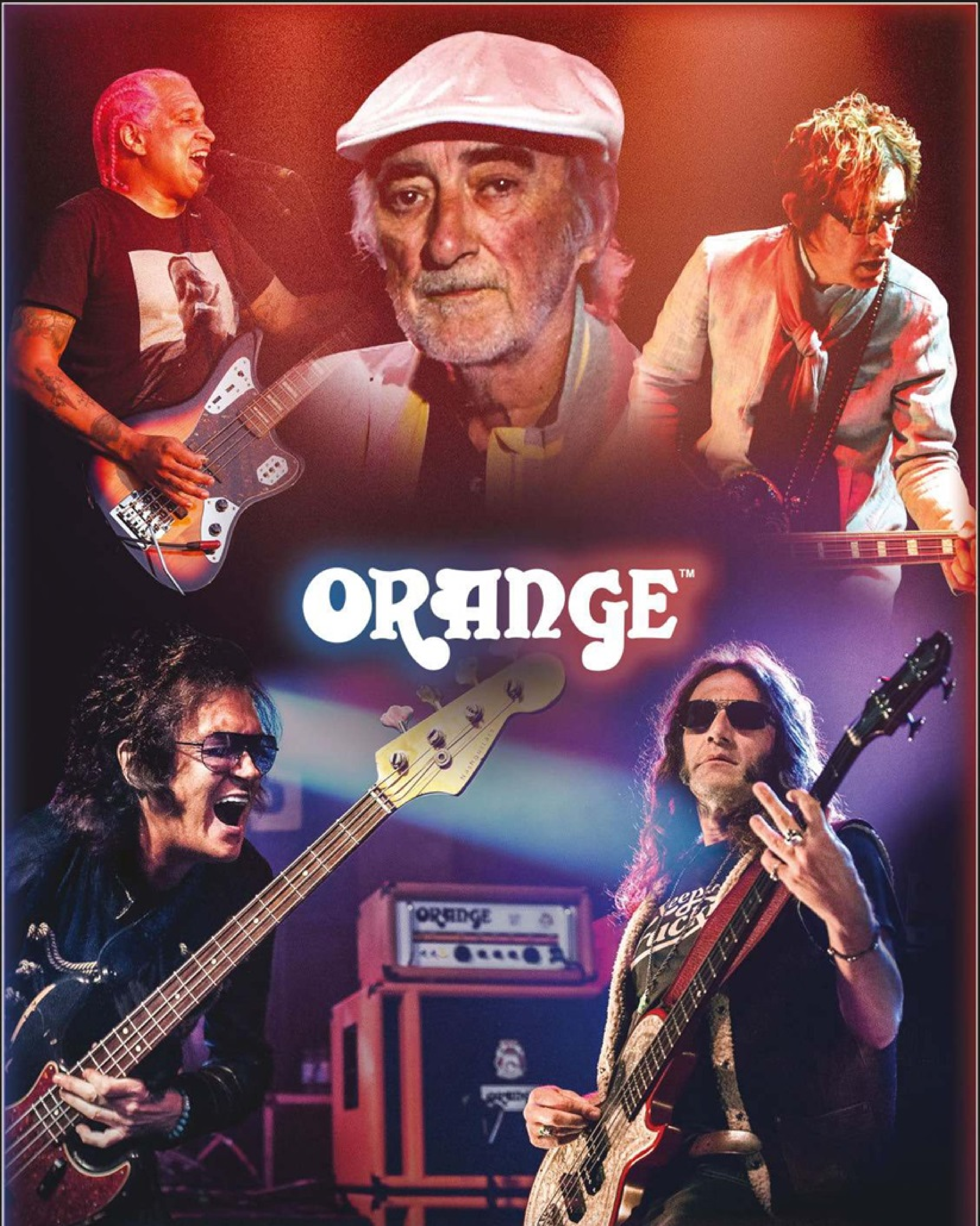
tweeter located in the centre. Around the back, each driver has its own circular port, giving the cab an extended low end and a healthy 35Hz-15kHz of nice, flat response. The cab has an 8 ohm impedance and can handle 300 watts, so two of them used together with a D400 amp would be a powerful and compact setup.

All of the PJB gear I've tried over the years has had a distinctive feel and sound. It's so clean and accurate that it almost seems to 'disappear' when you're playing. For double bassists, especially those playing jazz or arco, this is a huge benefit – and if this is your instrument and style, little has come close to a Phil Jones setup since the first compact combos were introduced. However, many bass guitarists have a slightly different set of criteria, and with recent class D amps like this one, plus the brilliant twin-channel D-600, Phil Jones seems to have made a conscious effort to broaden the appeal of their range. The D400 and Cab-47 sound as good as ever with an acoustic instrument plugged in, but it's definitely a bit more rock and roll than some of the smaller combos.

Plugging in an active five-string Jazz with the D400's EQ set flat, there's an impressive amount of deep, sonorous low end, which can be increased further should you need it; the cab can certainly handle it. The overall sound is clean and uncoloured and adjusting the powerful EQ, even to the extremes, results in an uncontaminated, usable tone. Turning up the Hi Mid and Treble adds crispness as you'd expect, but it never sounds excessive, and overall I'd describe the sound of this little rig as warm and natural.

All Phil Jones gear is now manufactured at the company's factory in Shenzhen, China. If you think for a moment that this is in any way a negative thing, think again. Phil Jones has not only overseen the building and setting up of the factory, but also personally trained the management team that organise the workforce. Any components that they don't make themselves – and there really aren't that many – are military grade and imported from all over the world including the US and UK, so you can be sure it's well designed and well made.

Overall, this a great-sounding, practical rig – and it's hard to imagine a situation indoor or out that a pair of cab 47s and a D400 amp wouldn't easily handle. You can't say that about many two-box rigs that you can carry in the boot of your car...



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BASS TUITION

Making you a better bass player

Welcome to our redesigned tuition section, in which *Bass Guitar Magazine* collates the wit and wisdom of the *crème de la crème* of the electric and upright bass world. We're fortunate enough to have some serious talent on the team, from world-class music educators to experienced touring musicians, who between them have laid down the low notes in every studio, club and arena in the civilised world. Note that we've divided the columns according to Beginner, Intermediate and Advanced level for easy reference. Whether you're looking to improve your playing technique, expand your awareness of theory, set up your rig to sound like your particular bass hero or simply get on a bus and tour, we provide the answers you need here. What are you waiting for? Dive in...
Joel McIver, editor

Kickstart your journey to the top of the bass world here!
Steve Lawson is the UK's most celebrated solo bass guitarist. Across 17 years of touring, and 42 solo and collaborative albums, he's built up a worldwide audience for his looping and processing approach to bass sound. Recent collaborators include Beardyman, Reeves Gabrels, Andy Gangadeen, Tanya Donelly, Divinity Roxx and Jonas Hellborg. He been teaching bass for over two decades, and lectures at universities and colleges across the globe. Victor Wooten once commented, 'Steve Lawson is a brilliant musician. I've known about him and listened to him for many years. He may not be one of the most famous bassists – but he is definitely one of the most talented'. Who are we to argue?
www.stevelawson.net

STEVE LAWSON

Beginners | 74

Now you're rolling with theory and techniques, it's time to hit the next level
Stuart Clayton has been a professional musician, writer and transcriber since 2002 and has worked in almost every conceivable musical situation – function bands, cruise ship gigs, theatre shows and more. He spent four years recording and touring the world with legendary Emerson, Lake & Palmer drummer Carl Palmer and has worked for BGM since its first issue. Since 2007 Stuart has worked as the Head of the Bass Department at BIMM Bristol, where he continues to teach all levels of the degree course. In addition, he has also worked as the Bass Guitar Technical Specialist for the Rockschool exam board. Stuart now runs Bassline Publishing, which publishes transcription books for legendary bassists such as Mark King, Marcus Miller, Stuart Hamm, Bernard Edwards, Stuart Zender and John Entwistle, as well as an acclaimed range of tuition books.

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate | 78

Take the bass world by storm with the ultimate tuition section
Philip Mann studied at Basstech, completing the London College of Music's bachelor's degree programme, secured a master's degree in performance and receiving a scholarship to study under Jeff Berlin at the Players School of Music in Florida. He then established himself as a busy electric and double bassist. Endorsed by Overwater and Vanderkley, he has appeared in London's West End and across Europe on many productions. His performance and session credits include recording at the legendary Sun Studios in Memphis, and working with Greek fusion guitarist Tolis Zavaliaris and the Big Band Metheny ensemble. He has featured as a solo demonstration artist at the London Bass Guitar Show every year from 2012. Currently, he is a member of the visiting faculty at the Players School of Music and lectures for Scott's Bass Lessons.

PHIL MANN

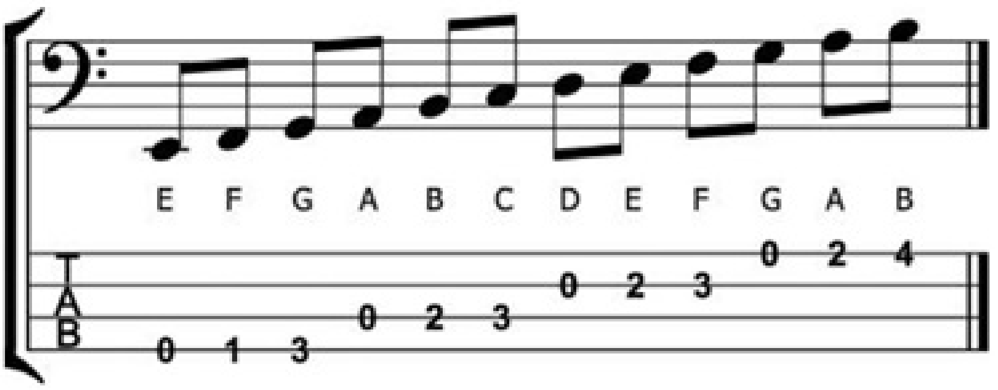
Advanced | 84

BGM Notation Legend

The following is a guide to the notation symbols and terminology used in *Bass Guitar Magazine*

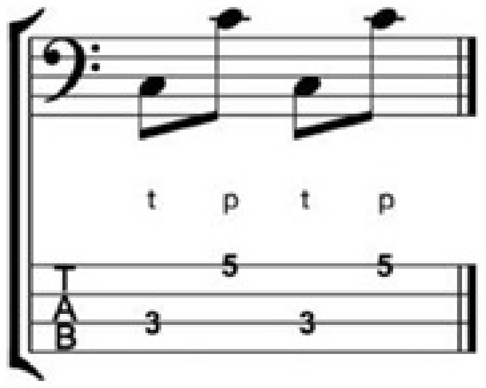
The Stave: most music written for the bass guitar uses the bass clef. The example to the right shows the placement of the notes on the stave.

Tablature: this is a graphical representation of the music. Each horizontal line corresponds with a string on the bass guitar, with the lowest line representing the lowest pitched string (E). The numbers represent the frets to be played. Numbers stacked vertically indicate notes that are played together. Where basses with five or six strings are required, the tablature stave will have five or six lines as necessary.



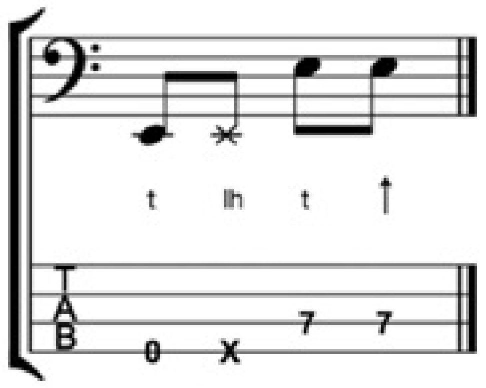
Notes shown in brackets indicate that a note has been tied over from a previous bar.

PLAYING TECHNIQUES



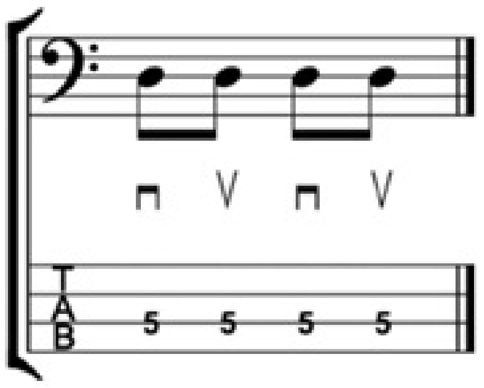
SLAP AND POP TECHNIQUE

Notes slapped with the thumb are marked with a 't', notes popped with the fingers marked with a 'p'



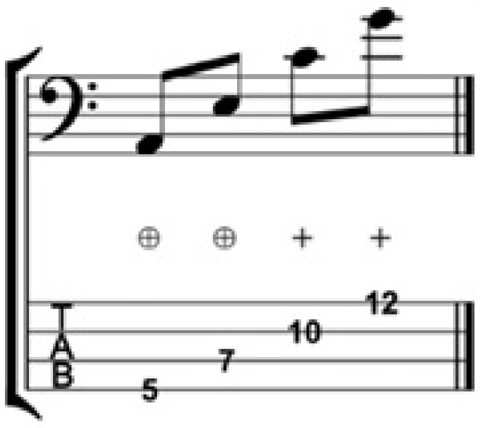
ADVANCED SLAP TECHNIQUE

Fretting hand slaps are marked 'lh' and double thumbing upstrokes are shown with an upward pointing arrow



PLECTRUM TECHNIQUE

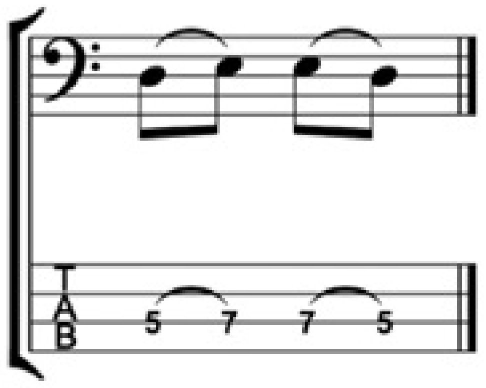
Where necessary, down and upstrokes with the pick will be shown using these symbols (down-up-down-up)



TAPPING TECHNIQUES

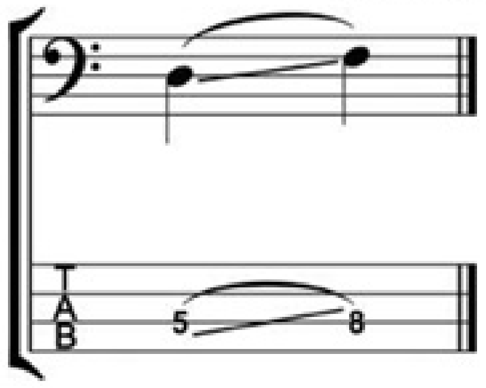
Fretting hand taps are shown with a '+' in a circle. Picking hand taps are shown with '+'. Specific fingers will be shown with numbers if necessary

FRETTING TECHNIQUES



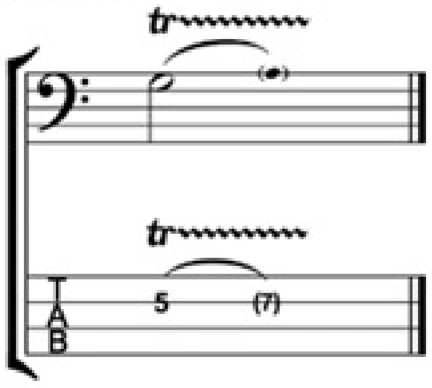
HAMMER-ON AND PULL-OFF

Hammer-ons and pull-offs are shown with a slur over the notes. Only the first note is plucked by the picking hand



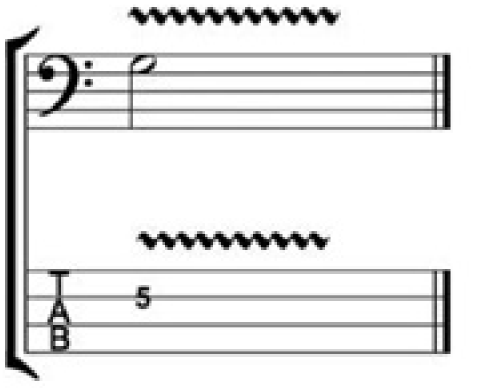
SLIDE (GLISSANDO)

Slides are performed by playing the first note then sliding the fretting finger up to the second note



TRILLS

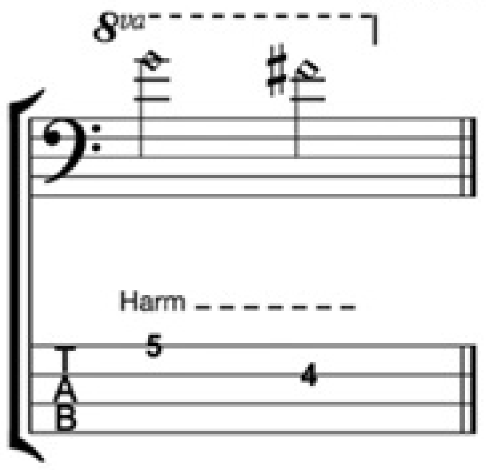
Trills are performed by rapidly alternating between the two notes shown using hammer-ons and pull-offs



VIBRATO

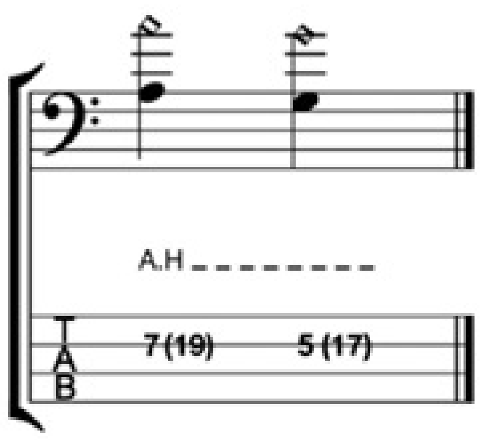
The pitch of the note is altered by repeatedly bending the string up and back with the fretting finger

PLAYING HARMONICS



NATURAL HARMONICS

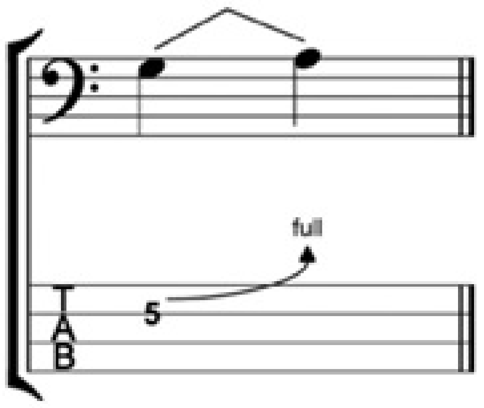
The note is played as a harmonic by lightly touching the string above the fret indicated



ARTIFICIAL HARMONICS

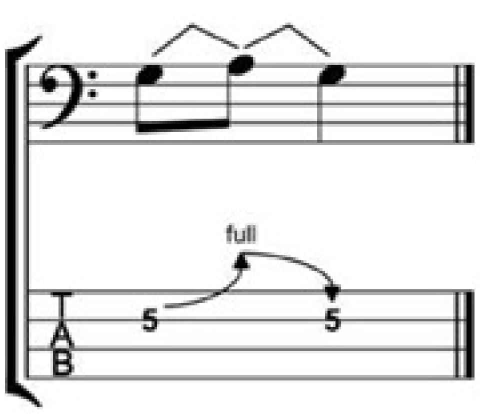
Pluck the string while fretting the lower note and placing the edge of the picking hand thumb an octave higher (the note shown in brackets)

BENDING NOTES



BEND

The note is bent upwards to the interval specified: ½ = semitone, full = tone



BEND AND RELEASE

The note is bent up to the interval indicated then released back to its original pitch

THE FRONT LINE

Want to make it as a professional bassist? Listen up as BGM's world-class bass team reports back from the tourbus

THE JAZZ BASSIST

RUTH GOLLER

Jazz warlock Ruth tinkles the ivories — and you should too

I've been thinking a lot about arranging recently, and how piano skills can help us do it. Even a basic grasp of voicings (in other words, the shapes of chords) on the piano can help you write out horn parts, rhythm section parts, and even big band charts. A lot of the early jazz composers for big bands were pianists themselves, so a lot of the voicings naturally came from the piano – so it makes sense to learn that way too. Most voicings for chords in the big bands can be broken down into different aspects. First, you have the main ingredients of the chord, the root and the 5th, which are the basic identity of the chord. Then there's the 7th and 3rd, which show you the function of the chord. In other words, if it is a dominant 7th with a major 3rd, for example, then it will often be used as a V chord, usually in a II-V-I sequence. However, a major 7th with a major 3rd is more commonly a tonic chord, as there isn't the tension of the dominant 7th needing to be resolved, so it is more often than not the end of the cadence in functional harmony. These fundamental aspects of the harmony are usually taken care of by lower instruments such as trombones – so why not consider the bass guitar for this role? Conversely, the upper notes of the chord, or extensions such as sharp 11ths or flat 9ths, are often handled by the higher voices such as saxophones. Following this basic principle, coupled with listening to lots of records and transcribing the particular details, you can start to arrange for larger ensembles, and give your ideas a bigger and more colourful stage. A great example of a composer who uses these principles very well is Duke Ellington. The way he arranged his own music is very orchestral, but the aesthetic and time feel is not. He took the best parts of classical arranging and applied it to his own vision – very inspiring!

www.ruthgoller.com

THE METALHEAD

DANIEL FIRTH

New bug Dan of Cradle Of Filth says a demonic hello

Nice to meet you! Whenever somebody first asks me about my bass playing, I feel the need to hold up my hands and dispel any misconceptions by announcing straight away that I'm a near-exclusive pick player, then jokingly describe myself as 'a heathen'. Although I say this mostly in jest, it truly is something that causes me a little concern, even as a metal player through and through. Objectively speaking, the argument about pick versus fingers is maybe a little redundant, as each can be preferable in different

© Leonardo Trevino

circumstances, and ideally both techniques should be in your arsenal. However, when you do as I do and favour a pick in 99 percent of situations, a bit of justification may be in order, and I would say this: versatility is important, but specialisation can be just as useful. From the day I first bought a bass, I found myself in bands that required fast, hard playing. As I had a grounding in playing guitar along similar lines, with a pick, there was little question of which route I should take to get the best results for gigs that were already looming. The weeks passed, more songs had to be urgently learned, and very soon entire new sets as I joined the ranks of established bands. Then came writing and recording sessions, just as swiftly. None of this left much time to get my fingerpicking up to extreme metal speed, and so I continued happily on with my trusty pick. I'm now at the stage where there's a huge gulf between my proficiency with the two techniques, and I personally find myself more inspired by the prospect of trying to become an exceptional pick player than another solid all-rounder. That may seem unusual, and I'm under no illusions; if you want to maximise your chance of making a lucrative career in music, you'd best be comfortable in any situation. However, I also think it's important to concentrate on the aspects of playing that inspire you to pick up your instrument every day. In other words, do what makes you happy!

www.cradleoffilth.com

THE ALTERNATIVE ROCKER

MICHAEL MCKEEGAN

You don't have to put on the red light, says Therapy?'s Mike

© www.ashleybird.com

We've been hard at it demoing new songs for a forthcoming studio album, and rather than go into a 'demo studio' we've set up a small recording rig in our rehearsal room. Apart from the obvious benefit of cheapness, we've got the luxury of a more relaxed working environment with no need for studio 'red light fever' panic. As the demos are more for reference, we've concentrated on simply showcasing the songs, as opposed to getting bogged down in multiple overdubs or post production high-jinks. I was initially conflicted as to whether I should record my bass with a clean DI sound for easier manipulation later on, or just keep focused on the more authentic dirty sound I tend to like. With these demos being done on the fly and the feel being quite vibey, it seemed better to get down the sound I was hearing in the room without having to re-amp or warm up later with plug-ins. For now, we're keeping it simple and punchy to concentrate on the dynamics and energy of the songs, as opposed to adopting a 'we'll fix it in the mix' approach. I also try and apply this approach to live recordings, radio session and broadcasts, where you can sometimes be at the mercy of an inexperienced engineer, or someone who's not aware of how your instrument should normally sound. I've had my fair share of moments where a live broadcast has featured a naked-sounding DI with none of the beefy amp or cabinet crunch I like. This is nobody's fault, really; it's easy to miss a channel, mute the wrong feed or even mistakenly think that's how the artist wants to sound. In these instances I insist that the bass sound being recorded is either a direct feed from my Sansamp pedal or a post-out DI from the bass head. That way I know my 'best side' is going to tape! There'll be time for experimentation once we start pre-production with our producer; I already have a list of effects and ideas I'd like to try out once we start tracking the songs properly. That's when I like to have a few different sounds going down so we have the option to blend or revisit things and add effects. Normally I do a DI off the guitar, a DI from the pre-amp and then one or two mics on the cab – so we have options if need be...

www.therapyquestionmark.co.uk

THE EXTENDED-RANGE SPECIALIST

STEWART MCKINSEY

Ten-string ninja McKinsey turns it up to 11

This month I'd like to examine volume. Dynamics are among the most powerful items in any musician's arsenal, but we're going to come at this from an odd angle. I return to the idea of thinking like a composer and not limiting yourself to thinking like a bass player. Sound is our medium of expression, but that means more than thinking in purely pragmatic terms. Have you ever listened to a keyboardist, guitarist or even a percussionist who made sound an effect for drama, texture or to enhance the emotional content of a moment? This can mean subtly bringing up the level of a note or a chord from a muted instrument, either with its volume controls, a volume pedal or via hand control and coaxing the effect with just your fingers. Alternatively, you could interject something completely unexpected by plucking notes on the other side of your bridge or nut, striking the body of your instrument with your hand, attaching alligator clips to your strings or slapping with a ring around your thumb, for example. It's easy to get so caught up in the technical aspects of what we do; remember, we're already outside the box by choosing extended range instruments, so why not go even further out? Play a bass part you're familiar with through a ring modulator or an envelope filter. Reverse all your tone settings from what you normally consider your sound. Try getting as close to a fretless sound as you can with just hand technique. What would you do if someone asked you to approximate the tone of a cello or a nylon-string guitar? Have you played through your regular exercises using your most aggressive attack? Have you ever watched a guitarist scrape a pick along the string to get something like a flanging quality? Have you ever used your fingernail to do something like that on your bass? In the lowest places on the big strings, if you do this slowly, you can generate almost cetacean sounds. As always, the only real limits we have are the ones we impose. Why not keep pushing past them? Growing as an artist means treating your creativity like a muscle or any other tool in the kit. It deserves free rein as often as anything else you do when practising, composing or performing. There's no reason to stop growing.

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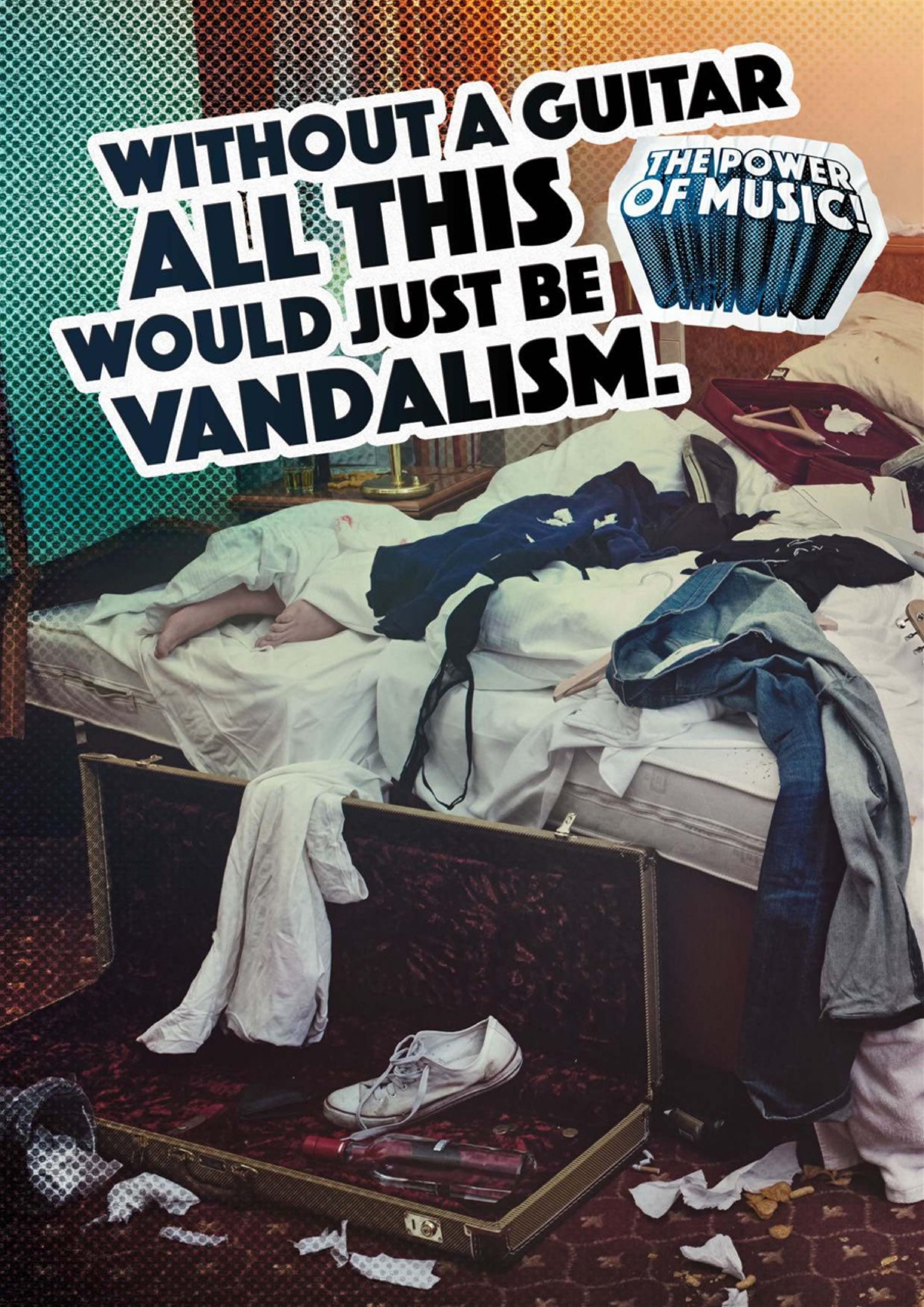
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STEVE LAWSON

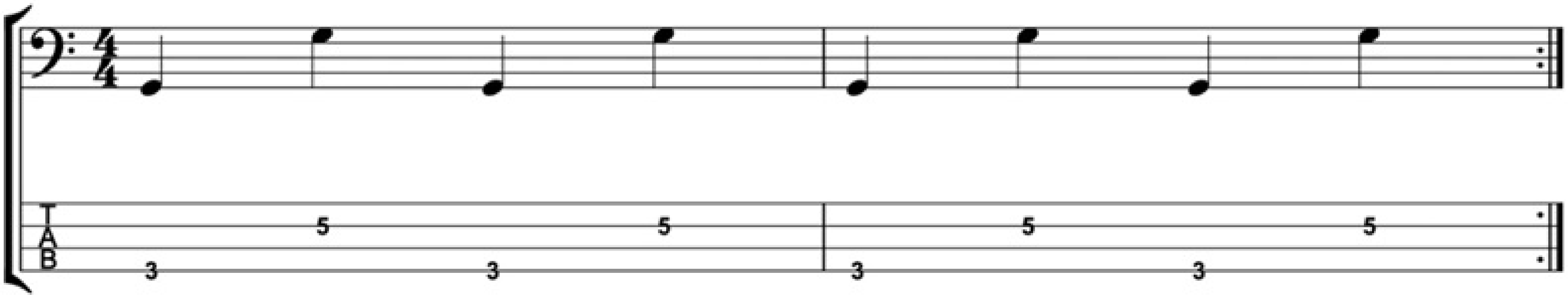
Beginners' Tutorial

Let's take things up a notch: Beginner's bass professor Lawson leads a lesson on octave bass lines

Welcome to – fanfare! – the tenth instalment in our journey into bass playing. I hope it's been instructive and enjoyable so far. This month we're going to be looking at one of the foundations of funk, soul and disco – octave bass-lines. This builds on our investigation of string-crossing last month, but ups the ante by requiring us to cross two strings at a time instead of one.

Let's start with alternating a single octave, using quarter notes, also known as crotchets:

Example 1



There are three main ways to play these notes with our right hand (not including using a pick). We can use one finger, two fingers or our thumb and first finger. Each one will change the sound in subtle ways, and make it possible to do other things before and after this bit of any line. There'll no doubt be lines that you find easier and others which you find harder.

The single finger version is the simplest to try. Use your index finger, and be careful not to accidentally strike the A string as we move from the G at the 3rd fret on the E string to the G at the 5th fret on the D string. Note that unless we want the two notes to overlap, we'll have to do some muting of each note by lifting our left-hand fingers up, alternating with the note that we're picking. This can take a little time to co-ordinate, so take it slowly. There are no points for rushing here, only problems further down the line as we get more complex if you don't get this stuff right from the start.

For the two-finger version, we assign one finger to each string; that means our index finger to the E string and our

Curling your hand round so your fingers point towards the neck changes the tone

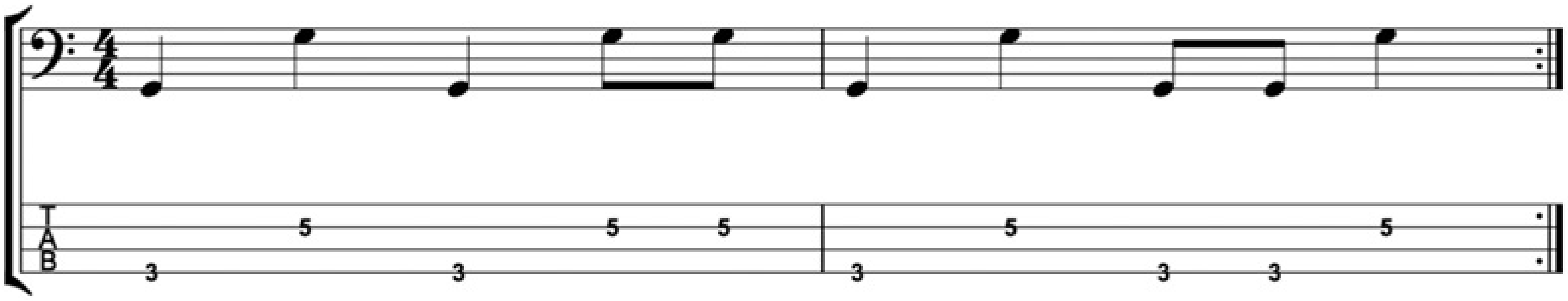
Pointing your fingers back towards the bridge helps keep them straighter

middle finger to the D string. Depending on whether you have an edge on your fingernail or not, the angle at which you strike the string might need some adjusting. Use the direction of your fingers as a way of varying the tone. For example, if your hand is cupped round as though you were going to mute the strings with the heel of your hand, and your fingers are pointing down the neck (see photo 1) that will give you a different tone from the traditional fingerstyle playing position, where your fingers are angled back towards the bridge (photo 2). Again, watch the muting with your left hand, and see if there is a way to help with muting with your picking hand.

The third position is to pick with your thumb and index finger. The playing position is similar to the curled hand described above; if you like you can help to steady your right hand by placing one or more of the unused fingers on your highest (thinnest) string. Again, the angle at which you strike the strings will vary the tone a lot. There's a straight line with a lot of variations along it between this and playing the octaves using the slap and pop technique. If you're already experimenting with slap, feel free to give it a go. If not, save it till you are!

Let's vary the line a little and see what that does to our playing choices:

Example 2



"THERE ARE NO POINTS FOR RUSHING HERE, ONLY PROBLEMS FURTHER DOWN THE LINE AS WE GET MORE COMPLEX IF YOU DON'T GET THIS STUFF RIGHT FROM THE START"

Picking with your thumb and index finger minimises large movements while string crossing

For lines with two notes up the octave, alternate your index and middle fingers

Now we have an extra high G in the first bar and an extra low G in the second bar. If we're still playing with one finger, it's going to get trickier to keep up, but the basic principle still applies. But if we're using two fingers, our options have changed. The high and low pair can either be played with your index finger first and your middle finger second, or vice versa. Either way, there's one note where you're going to have to shift your hand across the strings and play two consecutive notes with the same finger. That will take a little thought and practice to get right, so take it slowly.

If we're sticking with the thumb and index finger position, our options broaden even further and take us into territory that is often treated as an advanced technique, but which on a line like this can actually make life a lot easier. For the two notes on the high G we can use our index and middle fingers consecutively – and after playing them, neither finger needs to cross back to the E string, because the thumb has that covered.

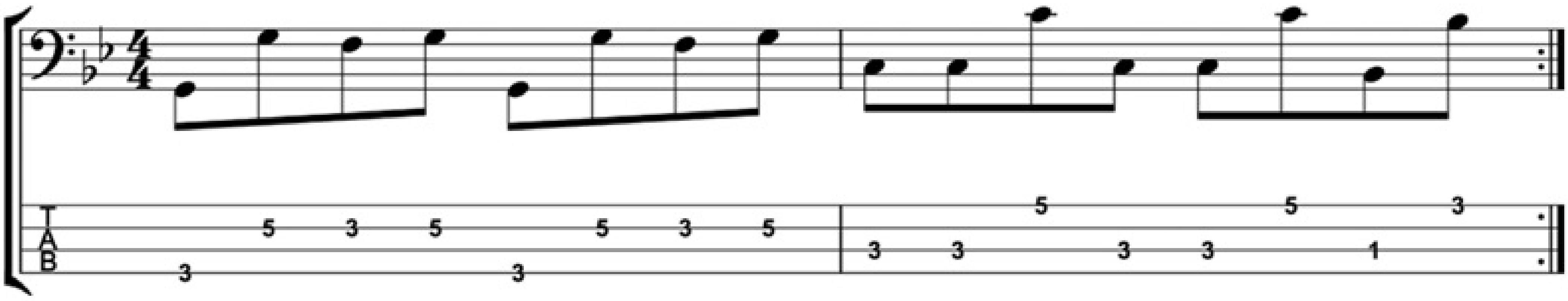
If you like the tone when playing in this position – and it is quite different from playing fingerstyle – it's a lot easier to get up to speed than playing with your fingers, but perhaps more difficult to make consistent, given the wide variation in possible tones based on very small movements of your hand.

The double note on the low G in the second bar is a little more tricky. At slower speeds we can do it by just playing the note twice with the side of our thumb, but as we speed up, getting back over the string in order to play it a second time gets harder. Here we can use a technique that is most readily associated with Victor Wooten, although it's been used by many other players through the years; playing alternate up and down notes with our thumb. This may take a long time to get comfortable with, and to gain accurate control of, but that's okay – as always, take it slowly, and work on it methodically. Once you get it, it makes many of our octave patterns much easier.

If you want to see just how crazy this technique can get, look up 'Victor Wooten double thumb' on YouTube, but don't get lost in the idea that this technique is the sole preserve of soloists. It's a really useful way to articulate simpler lines and it gives us yet another tonal variation to draw on when we want it.

Let's vary the line again, and bring in another string shift:

Example 3



"IF YOU WANT TO SEE JUST HOW CRAZY THIS TECHNIQUE CAN GET, LOOK UP 'VICTOR WOOTEN DOUBLE THUMB' ON YOUTUBE"

Lift your index finger up to mute the lower octave when playing the higher note

...and lift your little finger to mute the upper octave

Again, we've made the pattern a little less regular to introduce a few more areas for us to think about in terms of fingering and the choice of specific technique. It's worth noting that all these technical options are adaptable. There's no hard line between them, and sometimes while experimenting we can come up with hybrid techniques. If you're heading down that path, it's worth asking an experienced teacher to give you some pointers along the way, just so you don't end up doing yourself any muscle damage – but make sure you find a teacher who is open-minded enough to help you with your experiments rather than try to curtail them!

Playing this pattern with two fingers, we can't just assign our fingers to individual strings. Bar one actually allows for a strict alternating of first and second fingers, so we always play the low G with our index finger, the high G with our middle finger and the B flats with our index finger. The second bar requires a single-finger jump back down from the high C to the low C, unless you want to try that part of the line using strict alternation too. If you do this, you'll end up with your octave pattern reversed, with your middle finger on the low C and your index finger on the high string. Whether that's comfortable or not depends a lot on the exact position of your right hand.

Vary it and see what it makes possible; looping that second bar around and playing with strict alternation will give you a whole new set of possibilities, and if you get equally comfortable playing the lower of any octave pair with your middle finger, the range of rhythmic combinations and note groupings that will be comfortable for you will increase a lot.

In thumb and fingers position, this is a fairly easy line. The quavers (eighth notes) are unlikely to be played at lightning speed, so playing the second bar without incorporating the down/up thumb technique should be within reach, and it's also a good tempo at which to practice the down/up approach. Try both and see which one feels most comfortable.

For tunes that use octaves in interesting ways, check out 'Cool For Cats' by Squeeze, 'My Sharona' by The Knack, 'Everybody Dance' by Chic and 'Gimme Gimme Gimme' by Abba – and for octave leaps dotted through a much more complex line, try 'Synaptic Plasticity' by Blotted Science!

STUART CLAYTON

Intermediate Tutorial

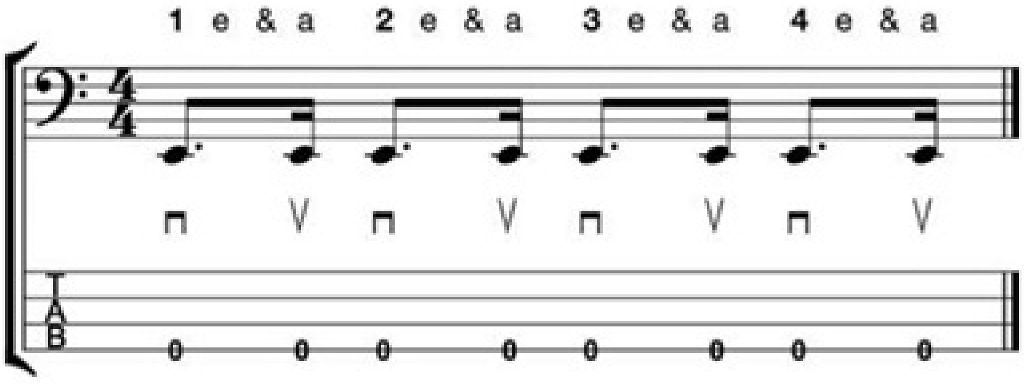
Almost nailing it, but not quite? Stuart is the tutor for you. This month: picks and how to use them with quaver/semiquaver rhythms

Welcome back to my column on plectrum proficiency! During the course of this series, we've been looking at the correct way to wield the plectrum, an oft-overlooked topic that in my experience as a teacher frequently leads to bad playing habits. By this point, we're quite far down the rabbit hole, so if you've just picked up the mag it might be an idea to get hold of some back issues if you intend to work through this material (this series started in *BGM* 146). In this issue we're going to continue to look at more complex quaver/semiquaver combination rhythms, this time introducing the dotted quaver rhythm.

Dotted Rhythms - 1

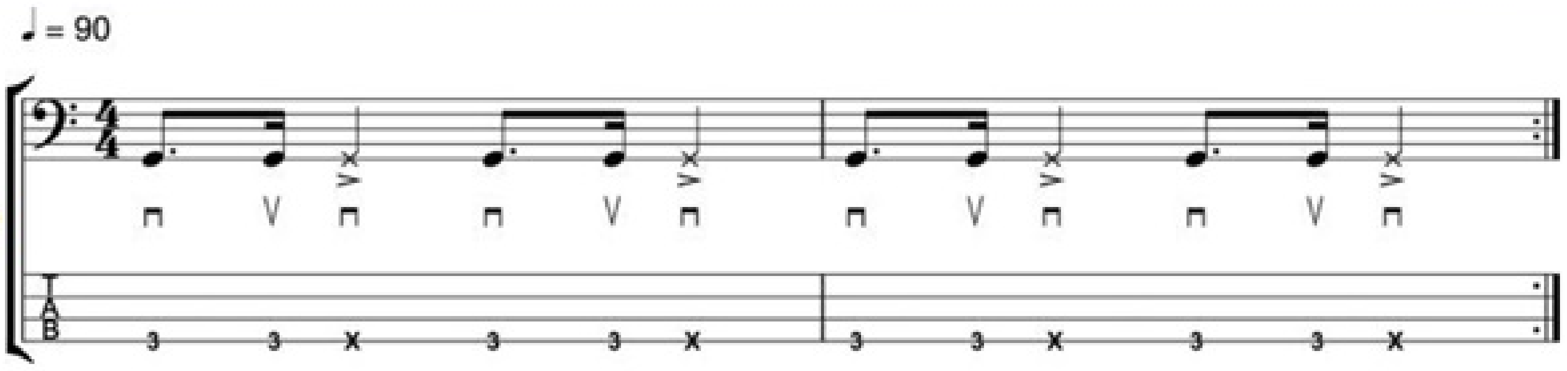
We're going to cover two rhythms in this column. Each of these comprises a dotted quaver, which lasts for three quarters of a beat, and a semiquaver, which lasts for a quarter of a beat. There are, of course, only two ways in which these rhythms can be combined: dotted quaver-semiquaver, and semiquaver-dotted quaver. Here's the first rhythm: a dotted quaver followed by a semiquaver. As you can see from the illustration, these notes fall on the first and fourth semiquaver subdivisions of the beat, and should therefore be played using a downstroke and an upstroke. If you recall, we use a down-up-down-up picking motion for a beat of continuous semiquavers, and these notes are falling on the first and fourth subdivisions: **down**-up-down-**up**.

You should note that when playing this rhythm, it is not necessary to go through the motions of playing each of the four pick strokes – a simple down-up will be fine.



Example 1

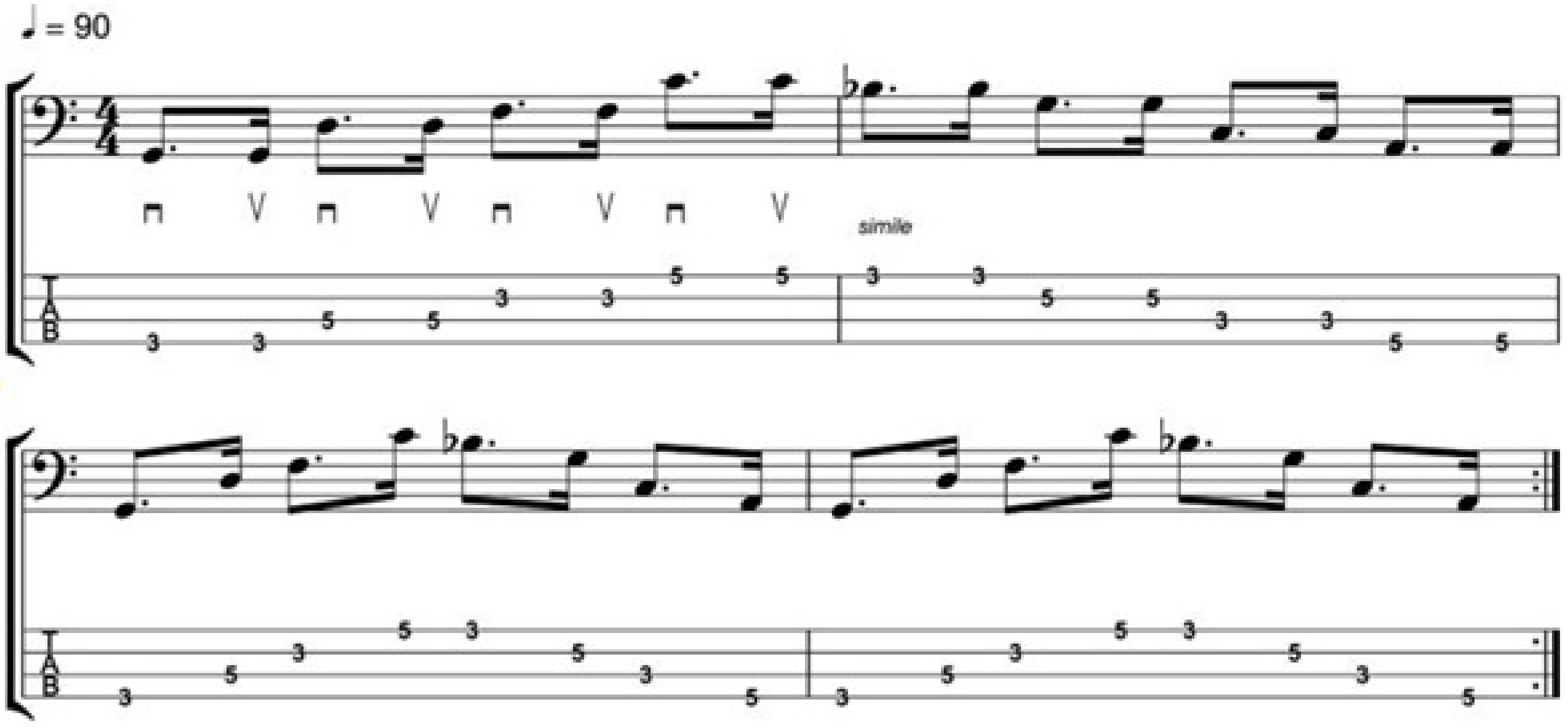
Here you will simply play the rhythm on beats one and three of the bar. Beats two and four are silent, but I've written in a ghost note on these beats. These ghost notes should be played with strong downstrokes, as they fall directly on the beat. Adding these into the exercise will ensure that you play the new rhythm with the correct down-up picking sequence.



Example 2

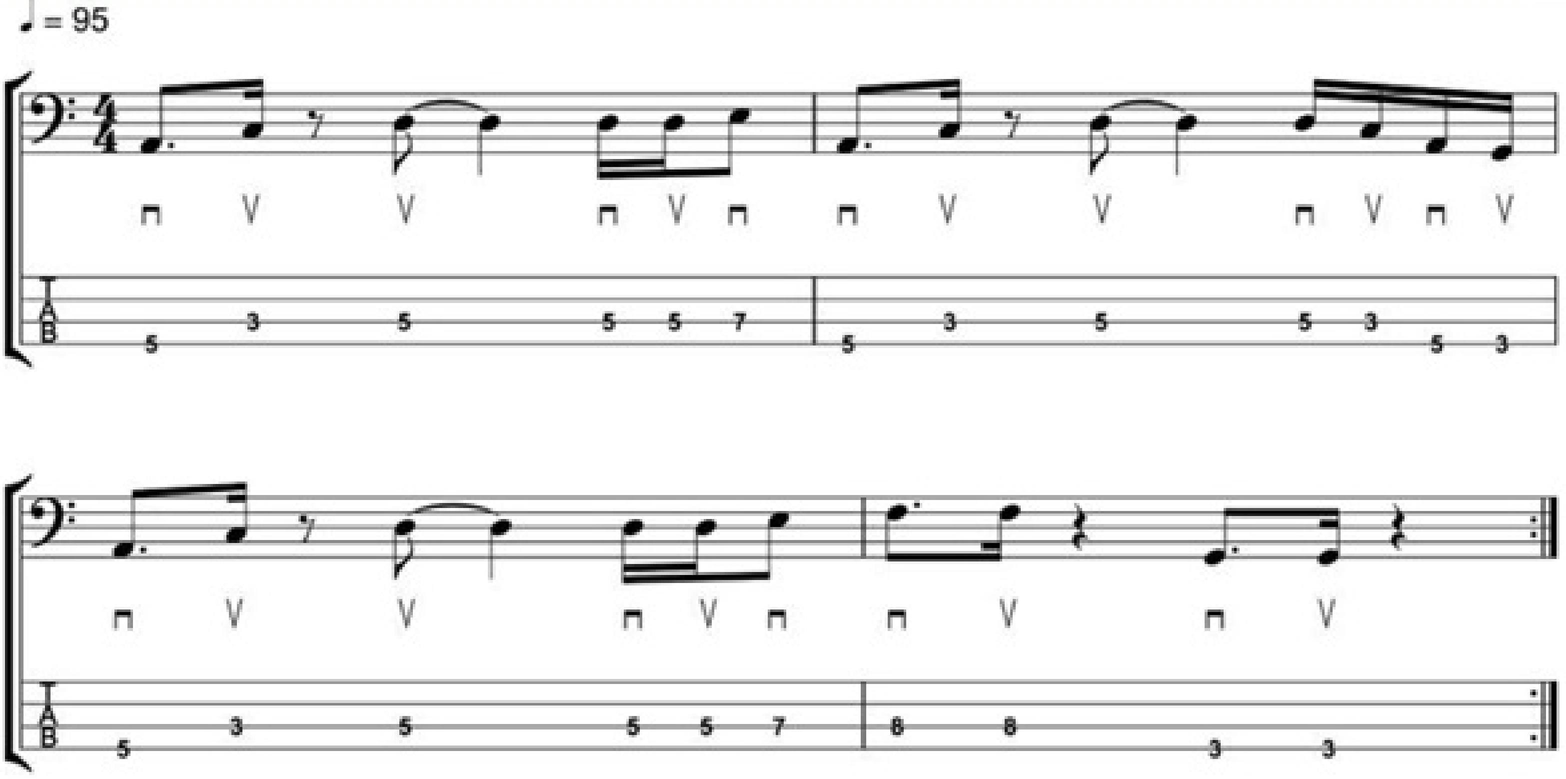
In this exercise we will use this rhythm in a string-crossing exercise. Don't underestimate the value of working on basic technique-building exercises such as this one.

Let's now look at some exercises which put this rhythm to use.



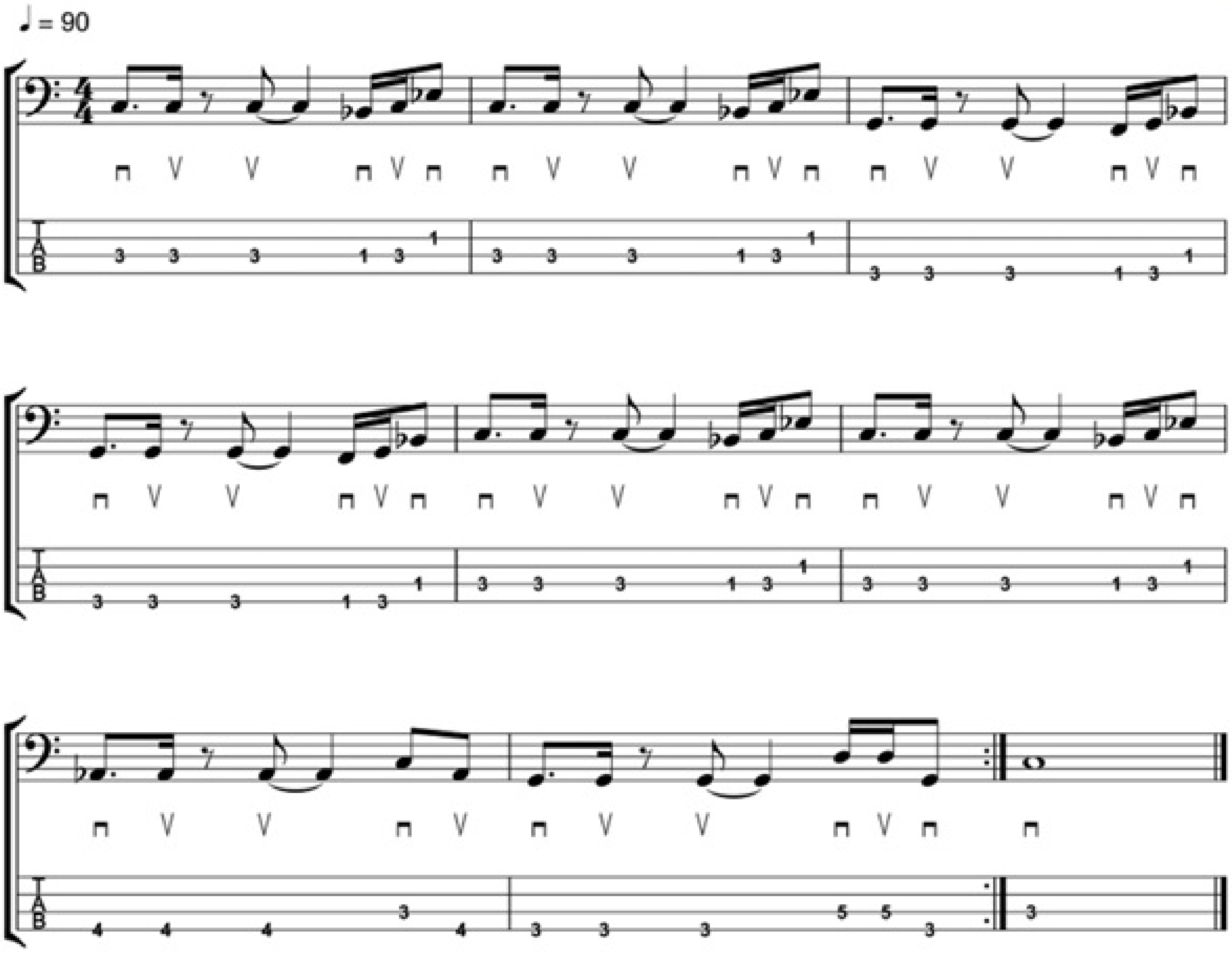
Example 3

This exercise is a slow rock groove that puts the dotted quaver-semiquaver rhythm to good use.



Example 4

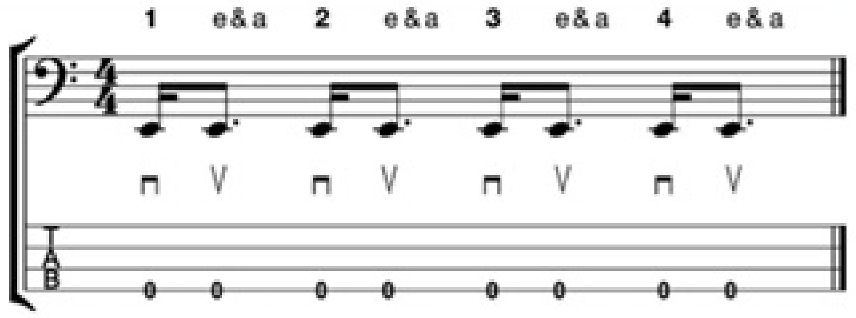
This longer exercise is a great workout for this rhythm.



Dotted Rhythm 2

Let's now look at the second dotted quaver/semiquaver combination rhythm.

This rhythm is the reverse of the first one: a semiquaver, followed by a dotted quaver. As you can see from the illustration, these notes fall on the first and second subdivisions and so are played as with a downstroke and an upstroke. This is a very simple rhythm to play.

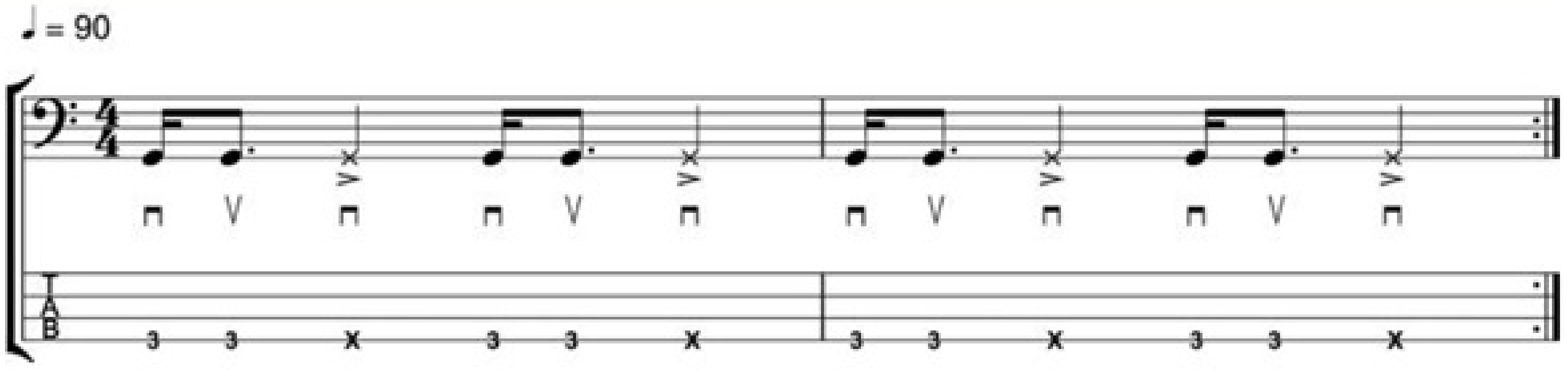


> "REMEMBER THAT AT ALL TIMES, YOU MUST AIM FOR CLEAN, ACCURATE TECHNIQUE: EVEN TRICKIER NOW THAT WE ARE LOOKING AT FASTER-MOVING RHYTHMS"

Let's look at some exercises for practising this rhythm.

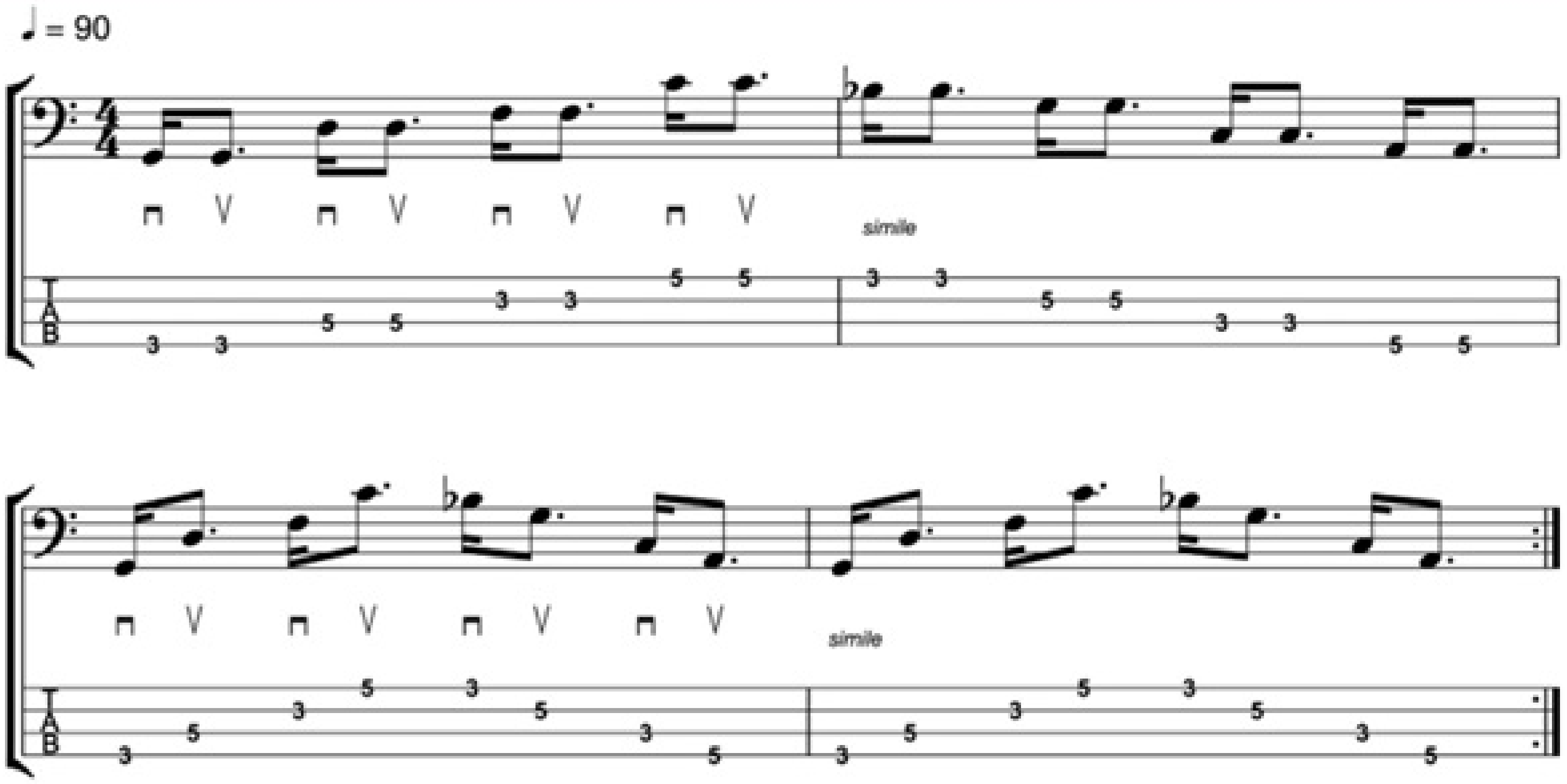
Example 5

In this exercise the rhythm has been used on beats one and three only. This allows you to both hear and practice it in isolation. As I did in Example 1, I've added ghost notes on beats two and four, which should of course be played with downstrokes. These are largely unnecessary here, as the pick strokes for this rhythm will feel very obvious.



Example 6

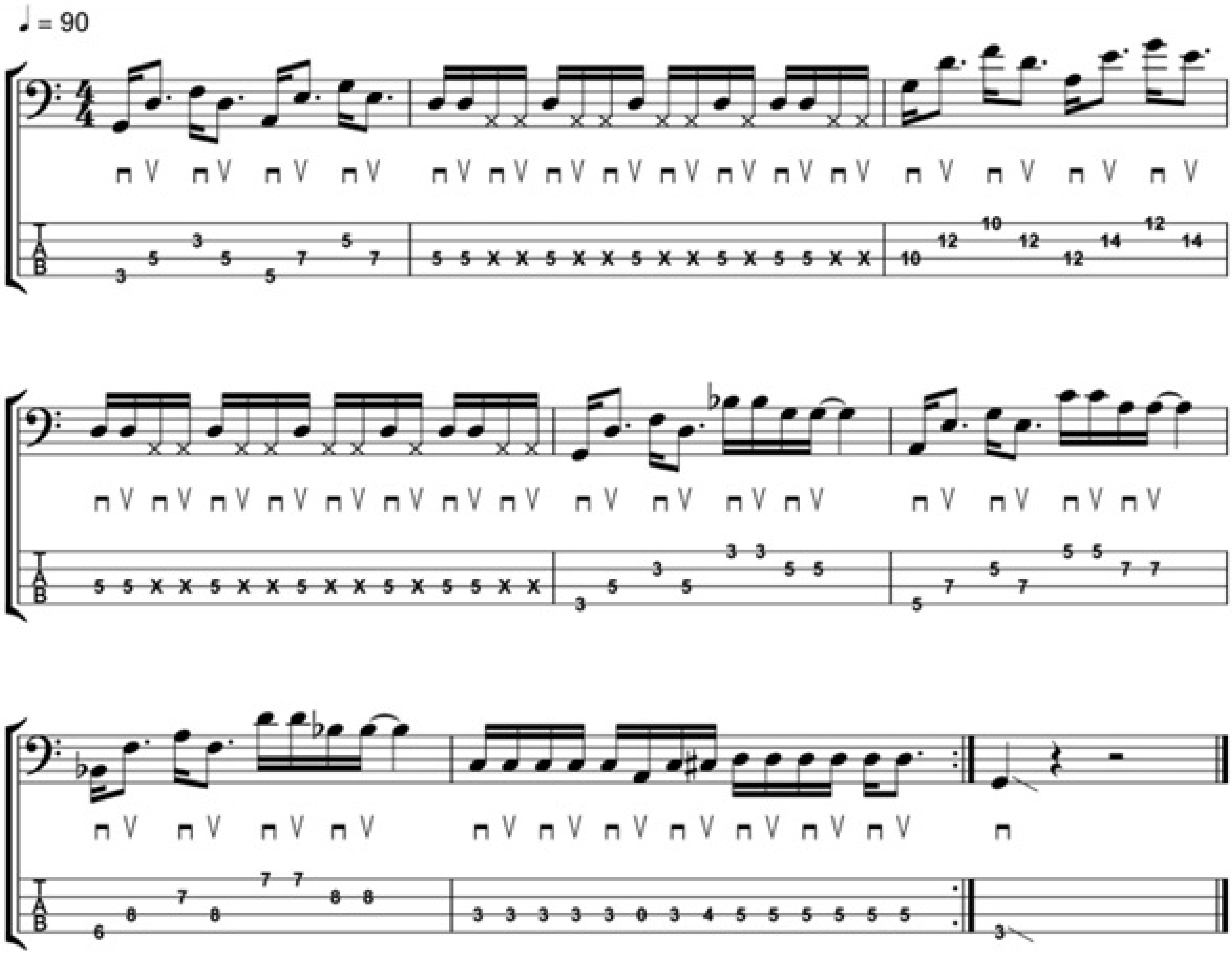
This is a string-crossing exercise. Note that although this is a simple enough rhythm to play, it gets tougher when you start crossing strings quickly.



Let's now put this new rhythm to use in a couple of actual lines.

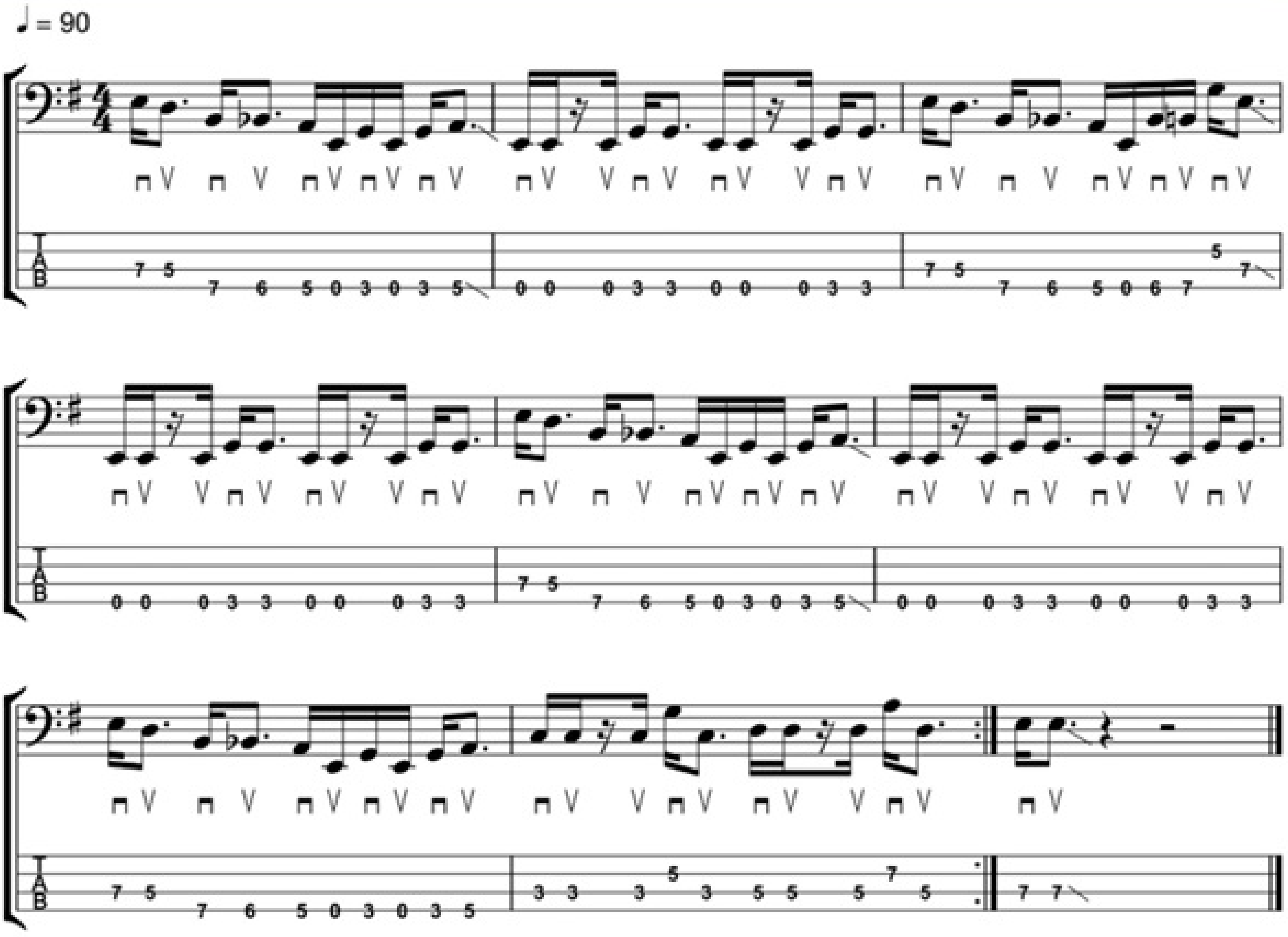
Example 7

This exercise uses the new rhythm extensively and involves a lot of string-crossing. Note that after each bar of the new rhythm we have a bar of continuous semiquavers, many of which are played as ghost notes. These are simple to play, although you may find that you need to slow this down considerably in order to play the pitched notes/ghost notes on the correct parts of the beat.



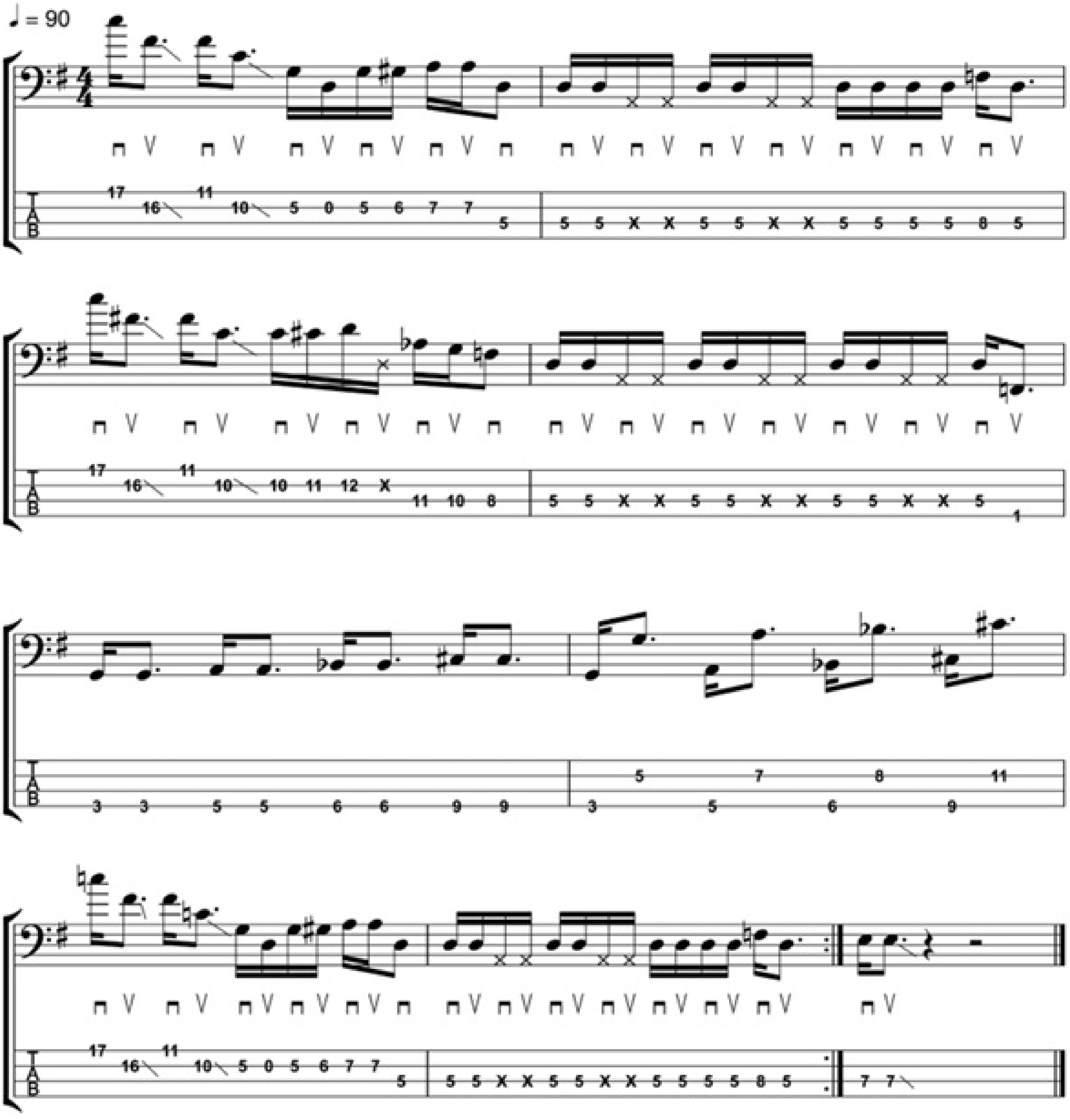
Example 8

This exercise is a funk bass-line that uses the rhythm. There are also some syncopated semiquaver figures (in the second bar for example) that require two upstrokes in a row. Syncopated rhythms such as these will be covered in more detail next issue.



Example 9

This final exercise is a more complex funk-rock line that uses the second rhythm to play a descending tritone figure in the upper register: over a D7 tonality, we play C and F# on beat one of the first bar, slide downwards then play the inversion of these notes (F# and C) on beat two. This is followed by a line that ascends to A (the fifth of the chord), then descends to D (the root). Much of the rest of the exercise builds on this challenging opening motif.



In this latest instalment of my plectrum series we have introduced two new, very important rhythms to your repertoire. It's important that you take your time when working on the exercises presented here: remember that at all times, you must aim for clean, accurate technique, something that will be becoming trickier now that we are looking at faster-moving rhythms. Don't be afraid to slow the lines down beyond the recommended tempo – it's far better to start slower and work up to speed more gradually.

In the next issue we will be wrapping up our work with semiquaver rhythms and covering some syncopated rhythms that result from incorporating rests and hammer-ons/pull-offs. Until then, practise hard and feel free to contact me via the magazine with any questions.

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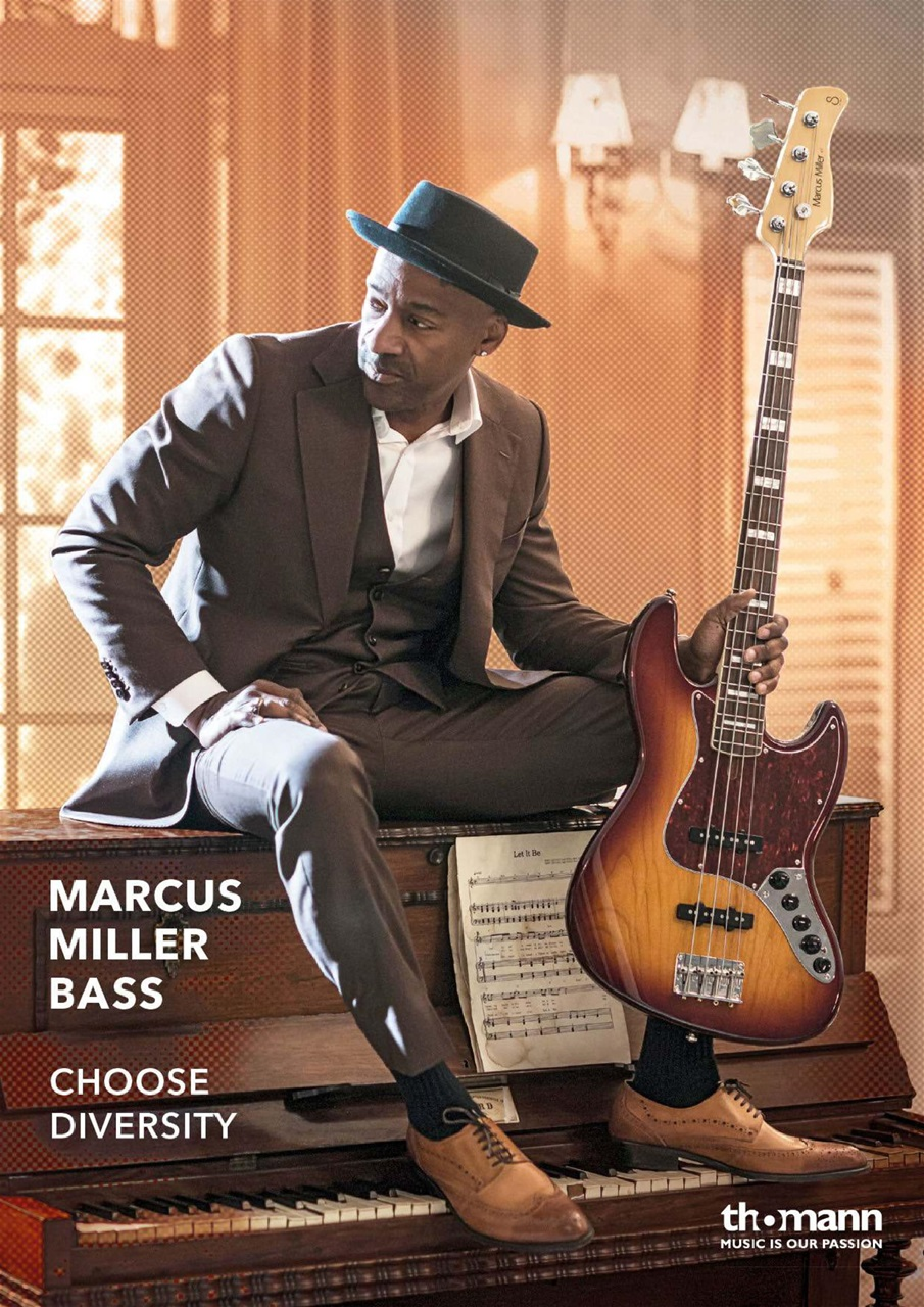

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Advanced Tutorial

Fancy a lesson in samba that will test you to the maximum? Phil takes his Advanced class for a spin

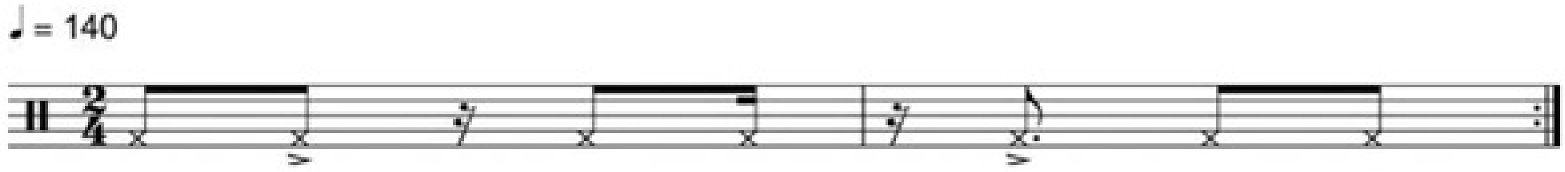
The ingredients involved in cooking up a mean samba are not for the faint-hearted, featuring relentless, high-speed rhythmic expression, enveloped in a flawless delivery of syncopation. These will raise the blood pressure of even the most prolific bassist. What's more, as with many examples of the Afro-Cuban genre, most significant components are still predominantly rhythm-based – so what would happen if we decided to also introduce a huge measure of melodic spice to the music?

Let me introduce the Partido Alto, a challenging, funky little number informally referred to as the 'Urban Samba'. Although the presence of the word 'Urban' may conjure up all manner of hipster stereotypes to some of you, Partido's contemporary nickname becomes apparent once you become acquainted with its rhythmic and melodic content. To put it bluntly, expect to be confronted with high-speed syncopated lines performed in unison, occasionally coupled with harmonic information that appears to have been composed by Miles Davis after the consumption of 10 pints of Special Brew and a vodka chaser on a Friday night...

The majority of Afro-Cuban genres are associated with a single definitive pulse known as the clave, and the Partido Alto is no different. However, rather than being governed by the traditional son or rumba patterns, the Partido Alto uses its own self-titled rhythm characterised by a 2/4 pattern delivered in either 'forward' or 'reversed' formats (the latter is far more common).

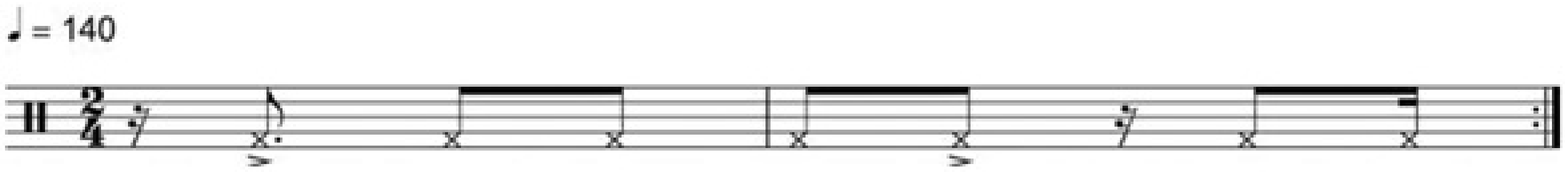
Example 1

Here's our first Partido Alto forward...



Example 2

...And now Partido Alto reversed.

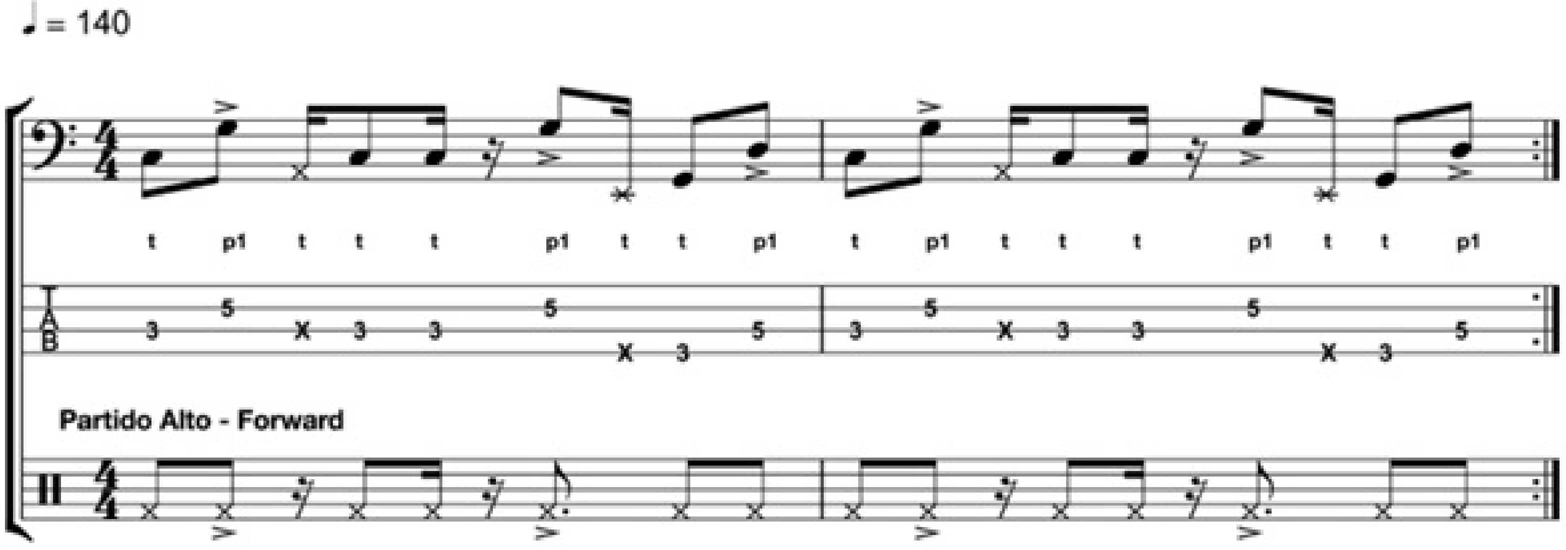


As you may notice in these exercises, the Partido Alto is authentically written using a 2/4 time signature. However, it's not uncommon for this conventional two-bar methodology to be combined to form a single 4/4 measure, as seen in Example 3, where a two-bar slap Partido Alto has been notated in the key of C. Before trying to play this study, take some time to compare the notation in both systems. The latter represents an underlying rhythmic pulse that always takes precedence, so this exercise will greatly improve your appreciation and awareness of the relationships that exist between the Partido Alto and its melodic interpretation.

Artists such as Aniceto do Império, Clementina de Jesus and more recently Grupo Fundo de Quintal have worked within the Partido Alto genre

Example 3

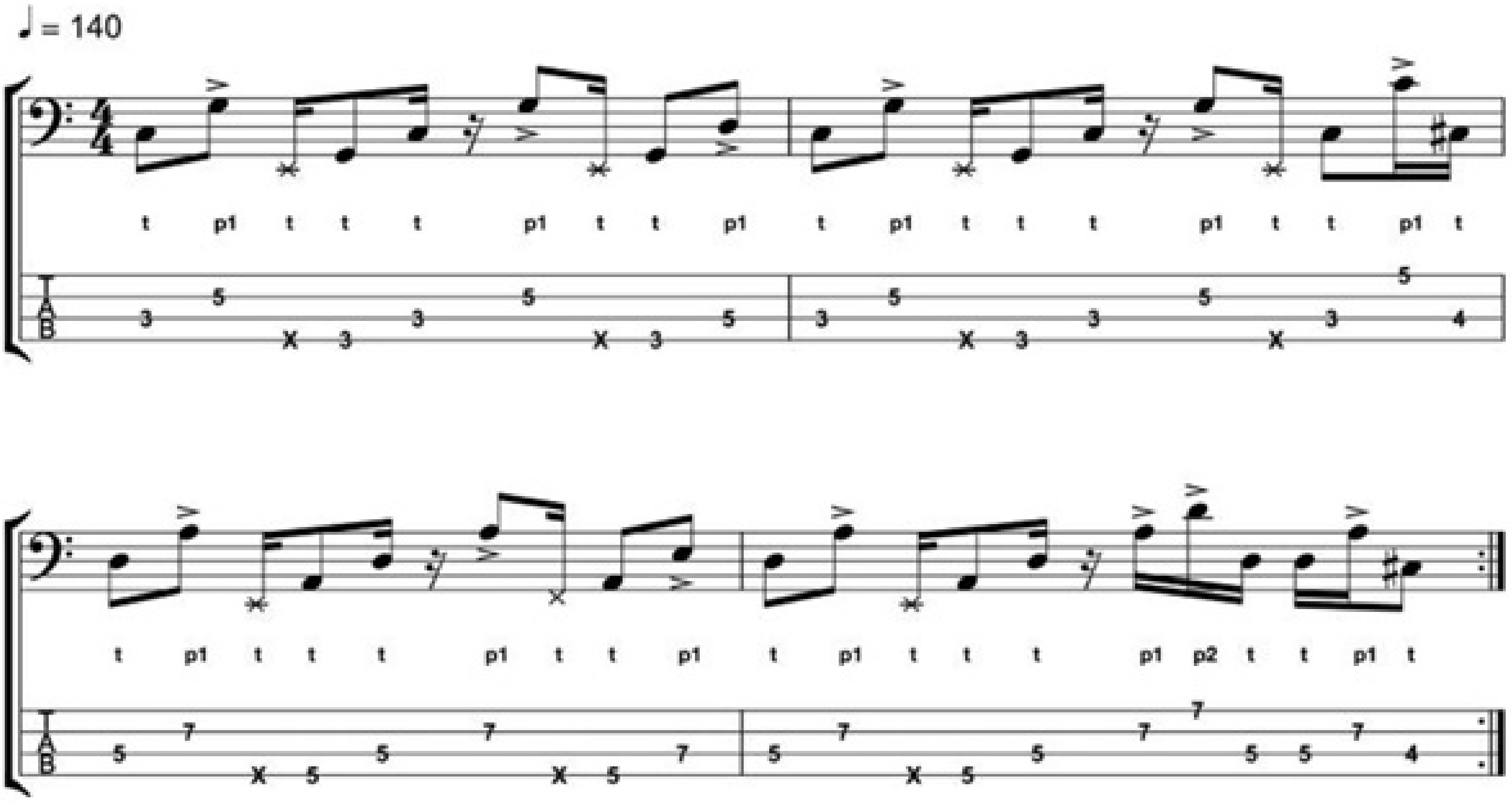
The Partido Alto is one of the most funk-orientated of the modern Brazilian rhythms. However, you will find that it is delivered at a slightly lower tempo than its close Brazilian cousin, the samba. This is primarily due to the amount of technical command necessitated by Partidos in order to reproduce them accurately.



Example 4

Example 4 introduces some additional melodic conundrums, which will soon become familiar to you when confronted by this genre.

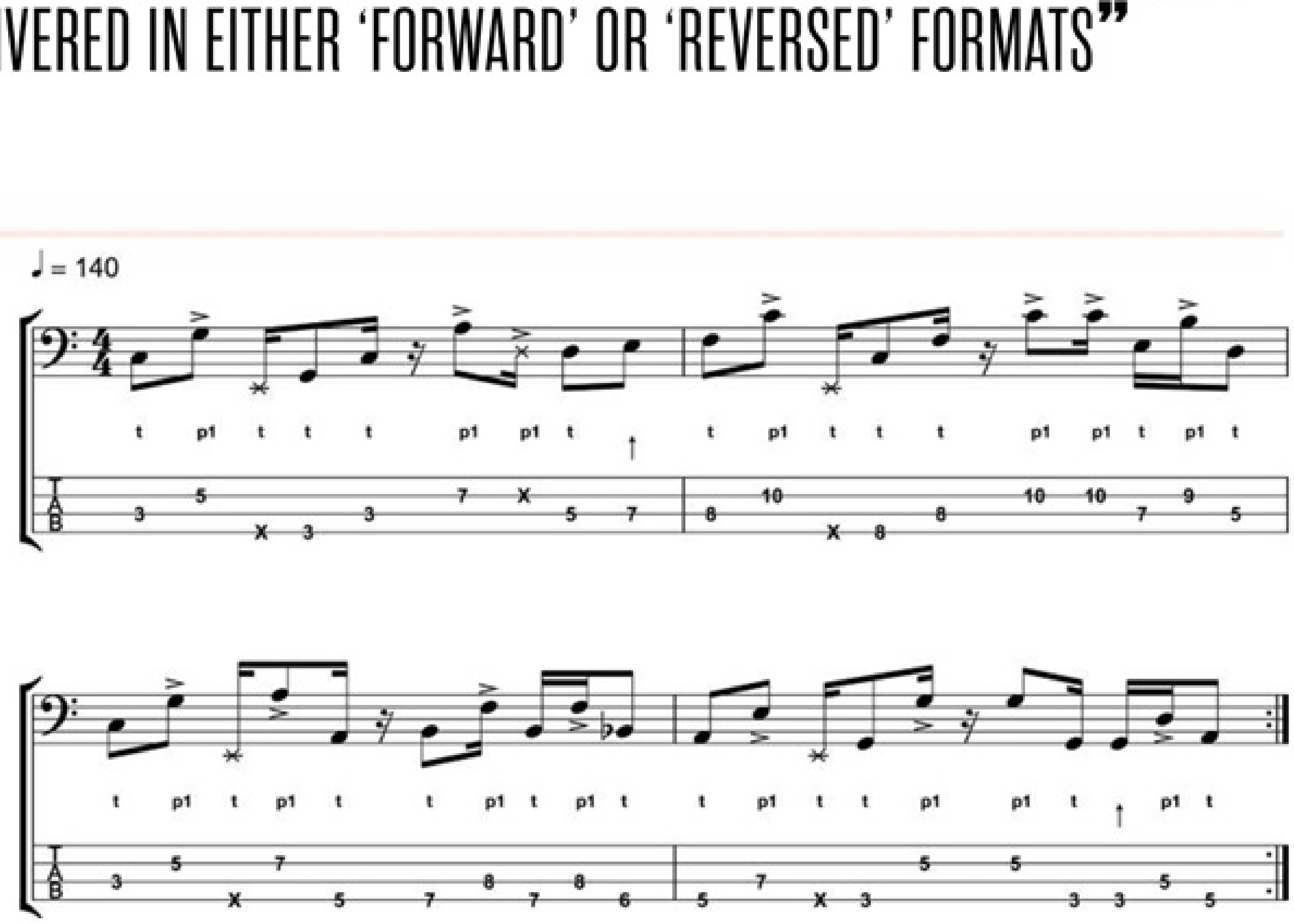
As encountered in the previous study, the technical command required to portray this genre of Afro-Cuban music can be rather intense. Fortunately (or unfortunately!), this general level of competency will now be considered as stock in all future studies.



> “RATHER THAN BEING GOVERNED BY THE TRADITIONAL SON OR RUMBA PATTERNS, THE PARTIDO ALTO USES ITS OWN SELF-TITLED RHYTHM CHARACTERISED BY A 2/4 PATTERN DELIVERED IN EITHER ‘FORWARD’ OR ‘REVERSED’ FORMATS”

Example 5

Example 5 continues with the implementation of various combinations of dead notes and double thumbing passages, all in an effort to develop your arsenal of funky goodness.



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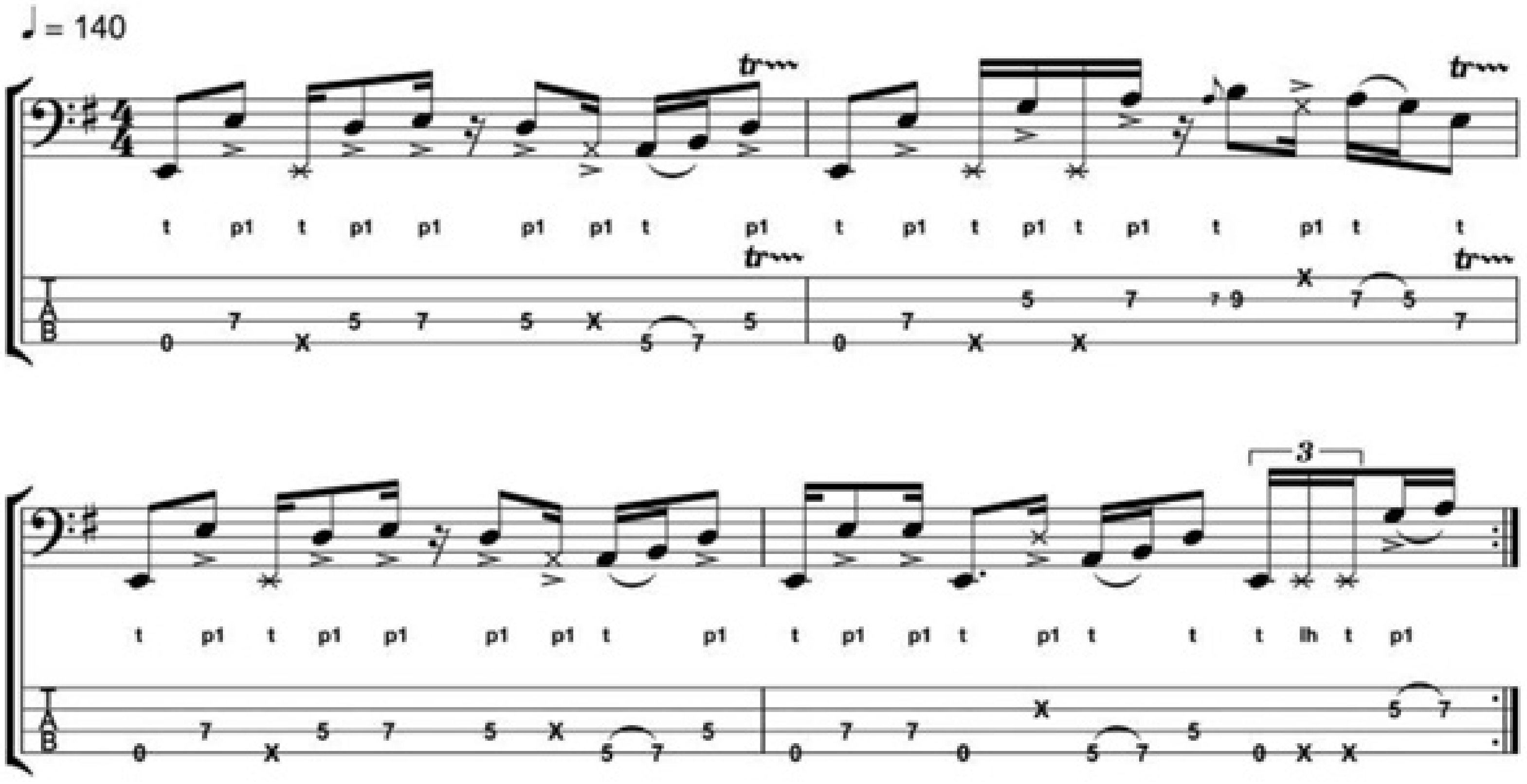
Example 6

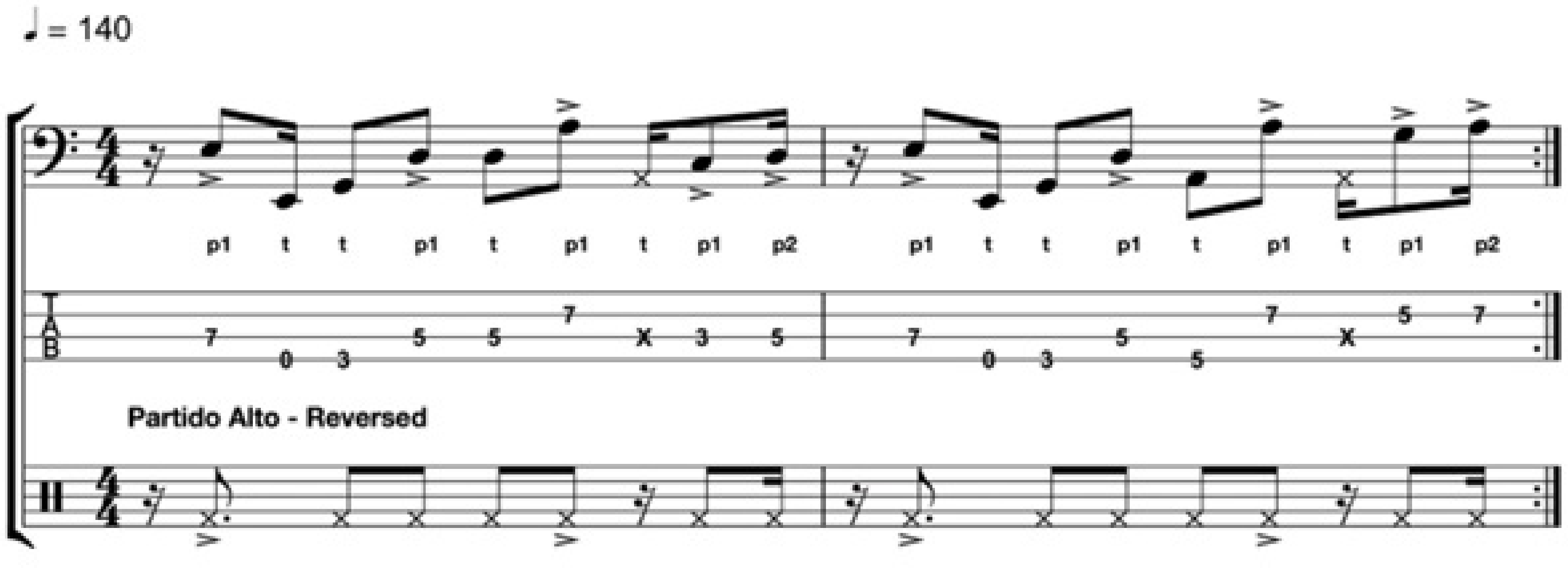
Example 6 introduces a number of supplementary semiquavers and semiquaver triplets in order to complement the preliminary Partido Alto template. Take note of the final beat of bar four, where a combination of left and right hand dead notes combine to produce the aforementioned semiquaver triplet.



"THIS STUDY WILL PROVE TO BE AN INDEPENDENCE WORKOUT FOR YOUR INDEX AND MIDDLE FINGERS"

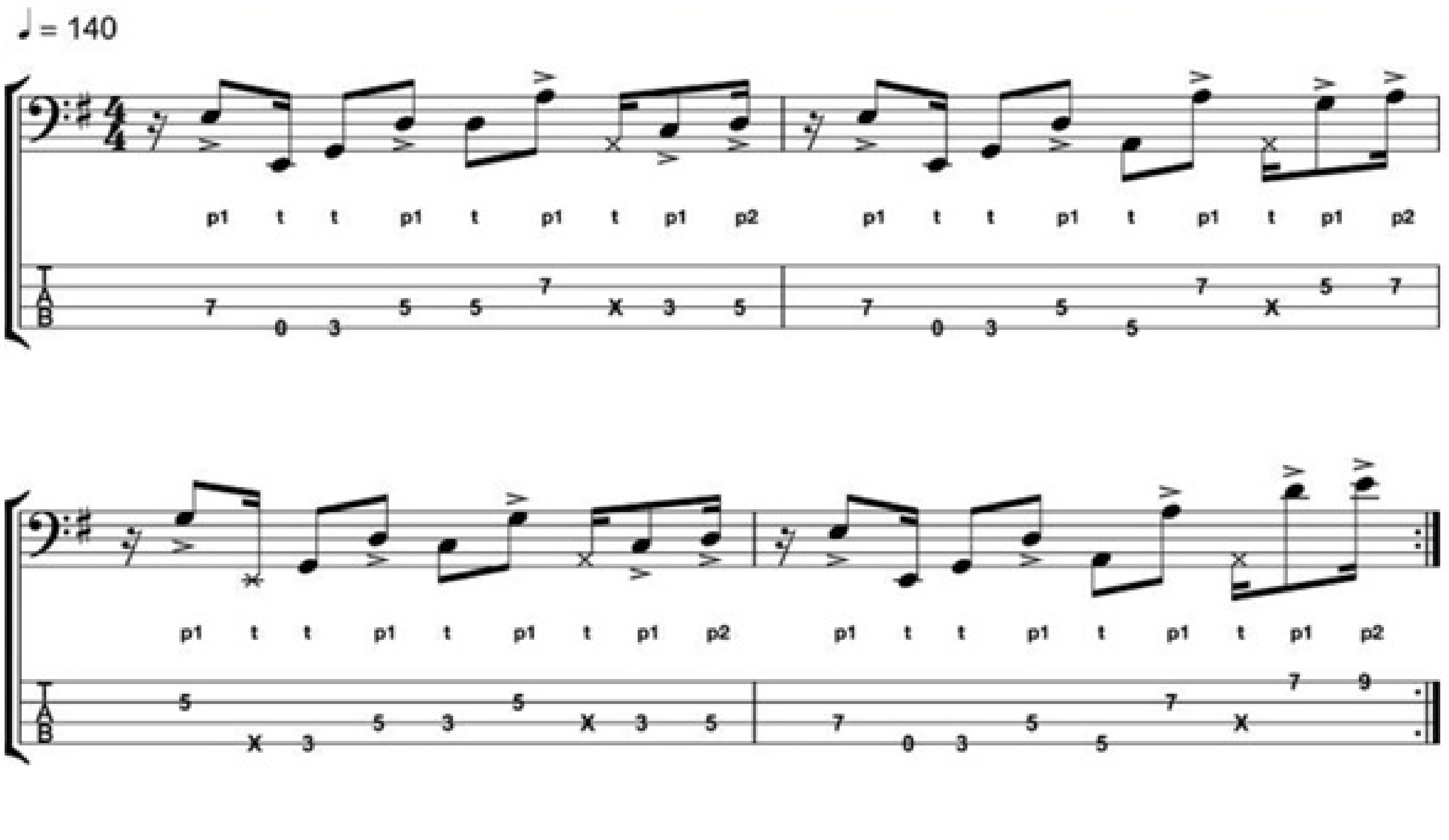
Example 7

As mentioned above, it's far more common to encounter a Partido Alto in 'reverse' format than 'forward'. Our next exercise switches the delivery pattern to encourage you to become further acquainted with this more frequent occurrence. One welcomed benefit of the reversed format is the uninterrupted unity of four quavers presented across beats two and three of the bar, which together portray an air of rhythmic familiarity to its overall content.



Example 8

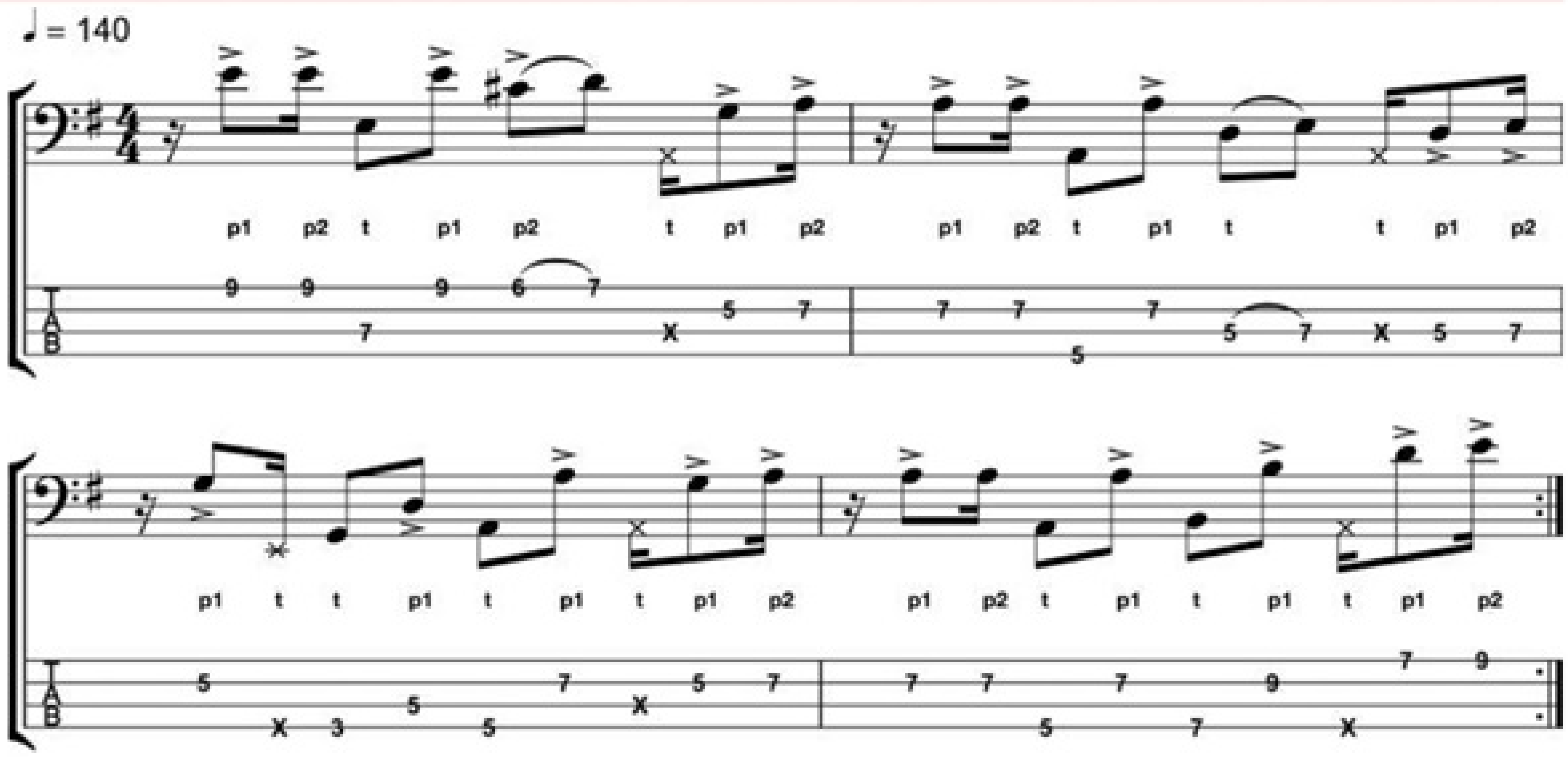
Exercise 8 continues to develop the initial Partido Alto principles from the preceding study. As with many examples of Afro-Cuban bass-lines, chord tones such as the third and seventh degree play a very minor part in the production of melodic content; more often than not they are completely omitted. This means that the majority of the patterns you'll study can in fact be performed over both major or minor chord structures. However, don't get complacent, as the aforementioned chord tones do tend to sneak in on the odd occasion, as you'll find out over the next four bars…



Example 9

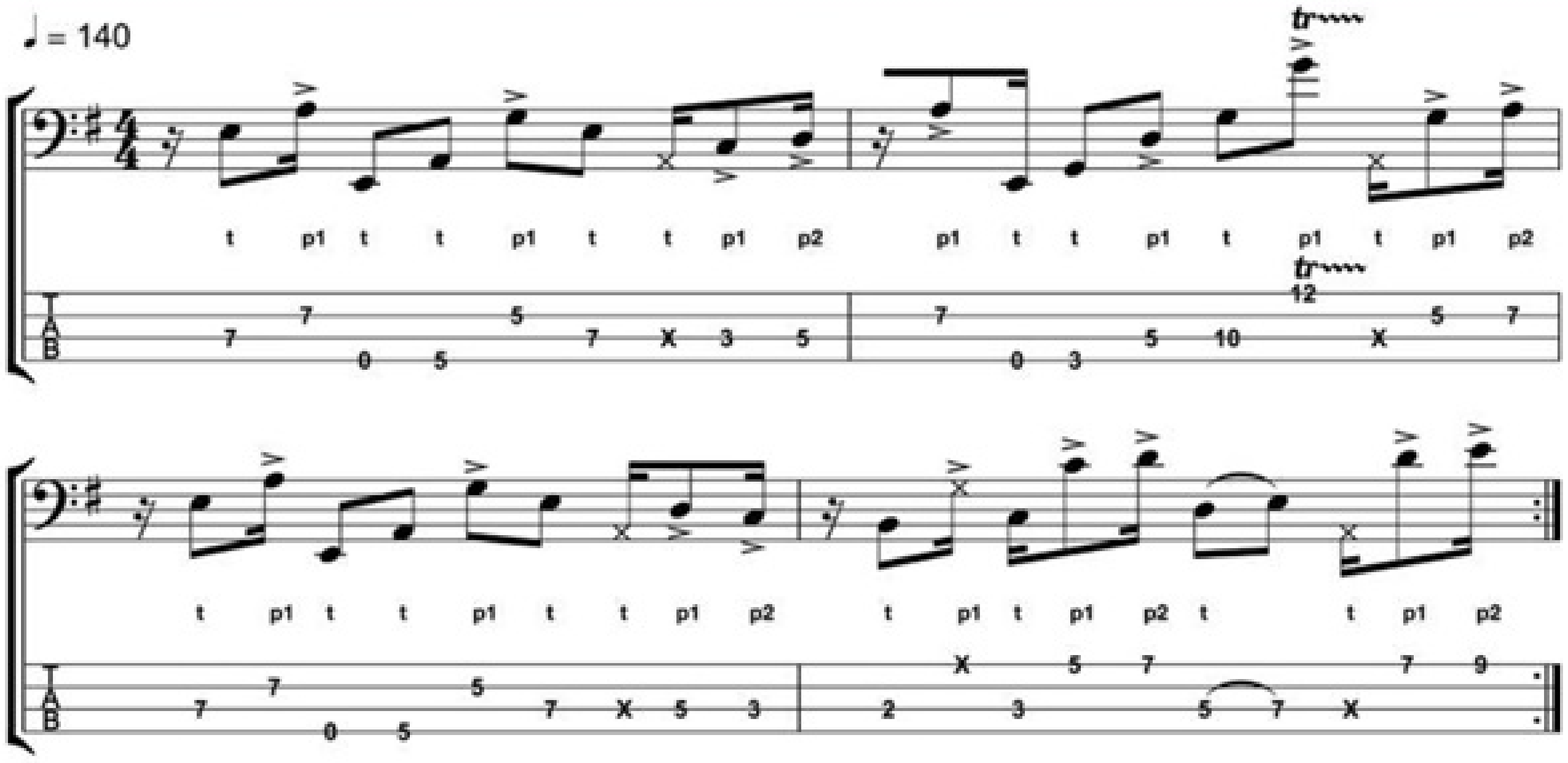
Continuing to focus on the reversed delivery method of the Partido Alto, Example 9 is more likely to tie you in knots than send you backwards (see what I did there?). Rhythmically speaking there are no new surprises; the stylistic parameters and relentless high-speed tempo markings that you have become accustomed to are still in full attendance. However, this study will prove to be an independence workout for your index and middle fingers.

As you work through the following four bars, be aware that the delivery of the plucked notes alternates between your index and middle fingers. This technique of double plucking is more commonly associated with semiquaver triplets, so having to deliver specific rhythmic information that is not of this nature may prove particularly taxing, particularly when you have to take into account the string you're being required to pluck.



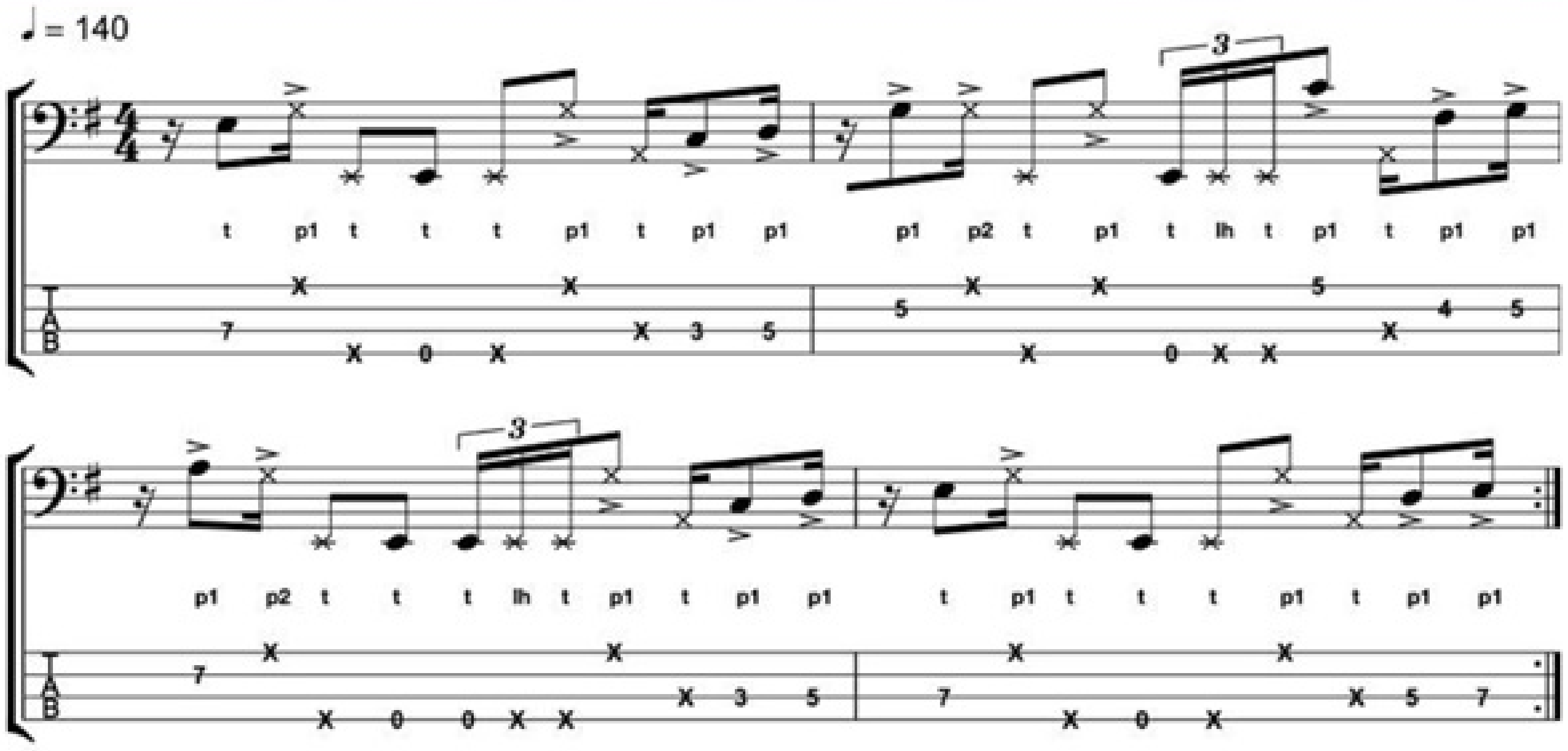
Example 10

The most significant feature to be aware of in the Partido Alto reverse is the opening melodic semiquaver, which you'll find just behind the initial downbeat in our final exercise. To our drumming friends, the measure's initial semiquaver rest will be irresistible: the resulting fills may play havoc with your ability to count the bar. If you're still able to decipher where beat one is after just a few moments, let alone an hour or so of performance, you'll be a better Mann than me!



Example 11

As with nearly all Afro-Cuban genres, 90 percent of the melodic information comes from the rhythmic foundations forged from the parent clave. Because the stylistic components are so rhythm-based, the ability to omit pitch and substitute the information for dead notes does arise. This month's final exercise investigates the potential in this school of thought, substituting a number of key pitches with nothing more than a percussive strike. There may also be the odd semiquaver triplet thrown in… I'm sure you'd expect no less!



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BASS ALBUMS

Mike Brooks salutes Queen's immortal *News Of The World*...

Let's climb into the *BGM* time machine this month for a trip back to 1977 and revisit Queen's reply to punk! Now celebrating its 40th anniversary in regal style with the launch of a new deluxe boxset, *News Of The World*, with its iconic cover, was very much a 'back to basics' attempt by the band to strip back some of the musical excesses of the previous two albums in favour of a more raw musical approach. Even so, the material on *NOTW* carries all the hallmarks that have made the band instantly recognisable.

Released in October 1977, the album reached number 4 in the UK and number 3 in the US and has since sold in excess of six million copies worldwide. It was the performance of the double A-side single (when there was such a thing!) 'We Will Rock You/We Are The Champions' that propelled the album forward, hitting number 4 in the US and number 2 in the UK, only kept off the top spot by Paul McCartney's 'Mull Of Kintyre'. Both songs are now anthems the world over of course, particularly when it comes to sporting occasions.

Bassist John Deacon, loyal to the natural/rosewood Fender Precision with which he recorded the album, occasionally used a fretless Precision and a sunburst Music Man Stingray live. He still favoured flatwound Rotosound strings at this time, and was mixing and matching Acoustic 370 amps with Acoustic 301 Reflex and Peavey 2x15 cabs, as seen in footage from the recording sessions and the videos for 'We Will Rock You' and 'Spread Your Wings'.

The two tracks from the first single launch the album. Deacon plays so many tasty fills and nuances in 'Champions' that I could fill the page highlighting them... and what a tone! Listening to the alternative 'raw' versions from the new box set, it feels odd to hear such well-known songs with a different vocal melody or guitar line. There's no denying the power of either song.

'Sheer Heart Attack' became a live favourite. The song had existed since 1974, but it found its time and place on this album, surprising many fans with its contemporary sound. The bulk of the guitar parts and the bass part were played by drummer Roger Taylor. 'All Dead, All Dead' originally featured guitarist Brian May on lead vocals, making the new version with Freddie up front rather a shock to the system. John's bass-line weaves perfectly around Freddie's piano part.

'Spread Your Wings' is one of two Deacon songwriting contributions to the album. Released as the second single, it didn't set the charts alight, but it remains a favourite among Queen fans, receiving a similar audience reaction to 'Champions' and 'Friends Will Be Friends'. 'Fight From The Inside' is a Taylor composition and fits perfectly into the mould of Roger's contributions to the band, featuring abrasive guitar lines and an almost aggressive bass-line. The new version of 'Get Down, Make Love' differs from the original '77 cut in that we get to hear the band basically jamming, instead of the extended effects section that later became a feature of Queen's live show.

'Sleeping On The Sidewalk' is one of the few bluesy numbers that Queen committed to vinyl. On the new box set, as the take used was the only take recorded, a live version with Freddie on vocal from the US tour of '77 has been used. 'It's Late' was the final single from the album and again is a fan favourite, a typical Queen audience-rouser, added to the live set on this year's US tour for the first time in decades. The album closer, 'My Melancholy Blues', is a fine example of Queen's ability to embrace different musical genres, with Mr Deacon playing a blinder. A fitting riposte to the Sex Pistols, we reckon...

"DEACON PLAYS SO MANY TASTY FILLS AND NUANCES IN 'CHAMPIONS' THAT I COULD FILL THE PAGE HIGHLIGHTING THEM"

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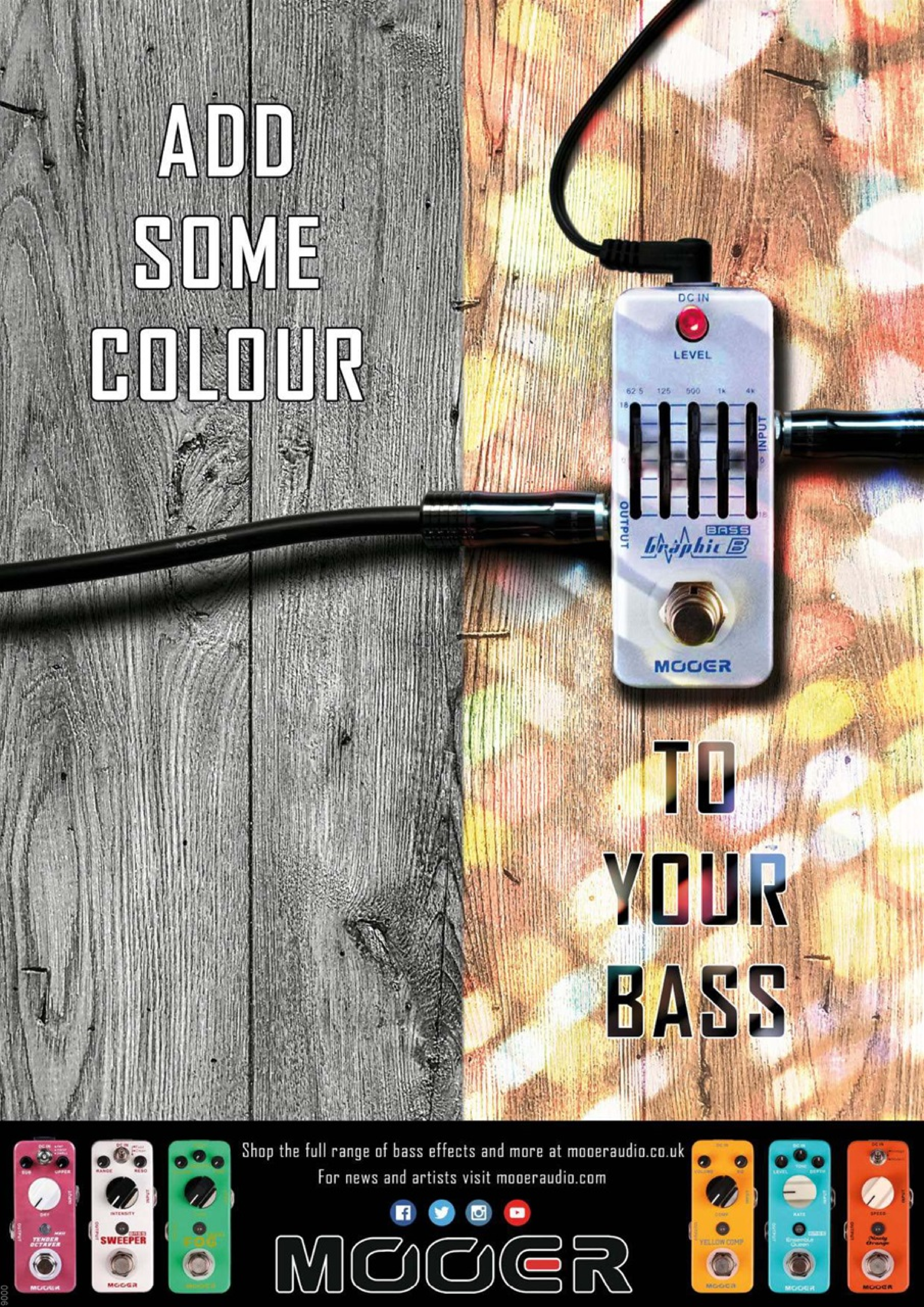
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